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A STUDY OF THE ROLE AND ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SELECTED
URBAN SCHOOL COUNCILS IN PURSUING THE GOALS OF
EDUCATION REFORM IN MASSACHUSETTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

BRYANT ROBINSON, JR.

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1997

School of Education

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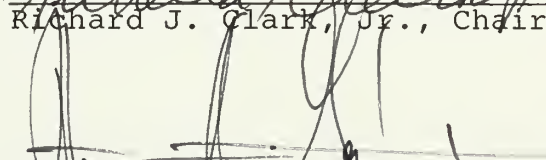
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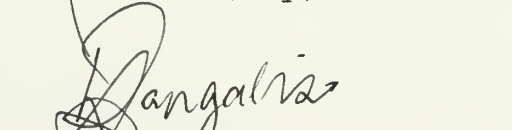
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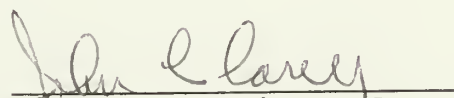
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To

My Parents

and

My Wife and Our Children

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE ROLE AND ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SELECTED
URBAN SCHOOL COUNCILS IN PURSUING THE GOALS OF
EDUCATION REFORM IN MASSACHUSETTS

MAY 1997

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The primary purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the role and accomplishment of selected urban School Councils in pursuing the mandated goals and objectives of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. The study investigated the effectiveness of current policies and practices of School Councils in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act in their school districts. Further, the study evaluated the perceptions of School Council members regarding the extent to which they are successful in pursuing the projected goals and objectives of the educational reform as a result of involvement in the development of a School Improvement Plan.

The sample for the study included Council members of randomly selected elementary schools from four urban school districts in Massachusetts. The data for the study were

collected through the use of a questionnaire validated by a panel of experts in the field of education and by conducting a follow-up personal interview with six of the respondents who volunteered to be interviewed.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were conducted to analyze the data collected for the study. The quantitative analysis was achieved by providing answers to the research questions through the use of certain descriptive statistics, as well as testing the research hypotheses through the use of appropriate inferential statistics. The qualitative analysis was pursued by classification and interpretation of the responses provided by the participating Council members to the open-ended items of the questionnaire as well as the resulting interviews.

With regard to the scope of the study and in accordance with the resulting analyses, several conclusions emerged from a number of significant findings.

Finally, in compliance with the significant findings of the study, a number of recommendations were made to those who are interested in evaluation of the role and accomplishment of School Councils. Future investigators are encouraged to replicate the study with a special focus on sampling representation and other methodological approaches to secure the generalization of the results.

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C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION

Change is one thing; progress is another.
-- Bertrand Russell

Background

During the past two decades, school restructuring has been fueled by widespread discontent over depressed student performance within our nation's schools, especially within urban communities. The notion of restructuring contains a variety of reform initiatives. According to Ellis and Fouts (1994), these efforts include a grab bag of innovations such as teacher empowerment, site-based management decision making, curriculum realignment, school choice, outcome-based education, parental and community involvement, as well as other related factors.

These attempts represent sincere efforts to change the schooling process, but the real challenge is to ensure that the change consequently results in different student learning outcomes. The very nature of bureaucratic instruction itself often represents a significant barrier to real progress. Obviously, the issues are complex and, thus, current practices have withstood numerous attempts at modification over the past century. Therefore, it seems

reasonable to assume that the proverb, "The more things change; the more they remain the same", is most appropriate.

Site-based management as a reform idea has become the clarion call of educational reformers today. This initiative seeks to reverse a decade or more of centralization and standardization of public schools. The change is clearly another attempt to reinstate decision-making authority to the primary unit--the local school. Lacking for no shortage of terms--decentralization, school-level or site-based management, school-centered decision making, participatory or shared decision making--the intent is to free schools to respond more effectively and efficiently to the special needs of students under the direction of those more closely associated with each local school.

Relying on Bertrand Russell's philosophy that "change is one thing; progress is another", change presumes a fundamental difference, while progress requires movement toward the goal. Thus, the ultimate question concerning the impact of site-based management is whether or not this change is fundamentally appropriate to move the educational process toward the goal of improved student learning outcomes. In other words, the key question is: How does site-based management specifically affect student learning progress?

Out of the crucible of the 1960s, and even up to the present time, came the demand for new changes, such as content, policies and procedures, methods and techniques, teacher training and recruitment approaches, as well as organizational patterns. These and other concerns gave impetus to integration efforts, entitlement initiatives, human relations training, staff diversity, effective schools movement, and mastery learning as possible responses to existing conditions. The vision was focused on improved schools for all children in order to develop students capable of competing in a global economy. Any number of indicators clearly manifest that this has not happened.

We have arrived at a point where widespread support for public education can no longer be taken for granted. Today, we must examine the nature of the changes being made and raise the critical questions as to how substantive they are. In conducting this study, the researcher was interested in evaluating the effectiveness of School Councils regarding the implementation of participatory decision making in Massachusetts public schools. The researcher was specifically interested in examining the implementation process and impact of a sample of School Councils in four Massachusetts urban school systems. Further, the researcher was interested in investigating whether site-based management represents progress toward

the Massachusetts Education Reform Act's stated goal "to improve student performance", or was it just another change--an altering in the outer appearance only.

Statement of the Problem

Unemployment rates have risen steadily as corporations have abandoned the communities that grew up around them, seeking cheap labor overseas or in non-unionized sectors of the South. According to an article by Kunin and Lukas (1996), the predictable job ladders of the 1950s and 1960s have been sawed off--"companies are portable; workers are throw-away". With a drastically increased cost of living, today the average way of a high school graduate is much lower than that of a graduate in 1963 (Kunin & Lukas, 1996).

American society is facing extraordinary demographic changes, according to an article by Orfield (1996), a sociologist at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The article refers to projections that suggest in around the year 2050, half the school population will consist of "non-White" students. Orfield believes that children are now the poorest segment of the population. The depth and concentration of child poverty has increased over the past twenty years rivaling 1965 levels. Many of the gains ethnic groups made in the 1960s and 1970s have deteriorated. History suggests that most of these setbacks originate in

the education, economic, and social realm. After World War II, minorities (Blacks in particular) streamed into the cities in search of work, precipitating at some point an exodus of Whites (Orfield, 1996).

Such significant changes were accompanied by an increase in the poverty index, reduction in the tax base, and deterioration of the infrastructure of American cities. The educational product of such conditions were young people, many of them minorities who were ill-equipped to function effectively in a rapidly changing global economy.

The nation's demand for greater achievement in schools over the past decade has resulted in a meaningful search for effective school systems. Current research has not only demonstrated that effective schools can make a difference in the academic achievement of students, but has also distinguished various characteristics of an effective school such as a focus on parental involvement, school-wide focus on basic skills, etc. (Edmonds, 1981; Evans, 1984; Fullan & Fomfret, 1977; Pechione & Shoemaker, 1984). Although there is no general consensus on the exact number of these characteristics, the leadership role of the principal stands out in almost all current literature as a primary factor in the development of an effective school (Edmonds, 1981; Johnston, 1985; Thompson, 1984).

The past twenty years (and the past decade in particular) have witnessed tremendous activities in the number and rate of educational reform movements. Colleges and universities, the federal government, states, foundations, school systems, privatization initiatives, and individuals have contributed to the efforts to reform the delivery of educational services in the public schools across the nation. Because of these actions, educators are challenged to make these attempts realities within the classrooms. These efforts have taken a variety of avenues to progress toward the goals and objectives of educational reform. The recognition that educational goals mean much more than improved standardized test results have led to the development of standards set by legislative bodies and/or state departments of education; the definition of learning outcomes by states and local systems; and the development of alternative assessment procedures based on standards and outcomes by states, by local systems, and by individual schools and teachers.

Considerable research has been conducted and procedures have been implemented based upon the benefits and effectiveness of cooperative educational techniques and peer learning strategies. Increasing the recognition that a relationship exists between a student's cultural background and his or her learning abilities has led to efforts in dealing with diversity through cooperative techniques

(Johnson & Johnson, 1984); by emphasizing teaching the strategies of learning (Maranzo, 1992); and through bridging and background building techniques in instruction (Pearson, 1990; Pikulski, 1991).

A number of studies have concentrated on determining attitudes and perceptions of different groups of educators regarding the effectiveness of various instructional techniques in fulfilling the educational needs of school children. Initiatives based on the recognition of the role that attitudes and perceptions play in effective teaching and learning (Maranzo, 1992) have been developed over the past ten years along with acceptance of the fact that the potential for learning exists in all children. Con- currently, there has been growing recognition of two major elements in successful education strategies: (1) involvement of parents in meaningful ways in the education of their children; and (2) development of collegial relationships among educational practitioners. These strategies have gained impetus in recent years based largely on the recognition of such needs and particularly on legislative or bureaucratic mandates. The enactment of Title I (presently known as Chapter I) federal assistance for the educationally disadvantaged required the creation of parent advisory councils at the state, district, and school levels and required parental involvement in the decision-making process. Public Law 94-142, which allocated funds

for special education students, also mandated parental input into the individual educational plans of their children. Both of these requirements (Title I and Public Law 94-142) were elaborated by the Massachusetts Department of Education in establishing parental involvement in Title I and the Chapter 766 (Special Education) programs across the State.

During this same period, ideas were emerging for change in the way schools were being managed. The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) issued a report of the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession which contained recommendations regarding collegial relationships, management by committee, and other types of management. The work of Sizer (1983) and others in the restructuring movement of the 1980s brought direction to changes in school governance practices. A considerable body of research is available from the work done on effective schools, school leadership, and parental input into the processes of teaching, learning, and school organization. A number of these studies have concluded that effective schools, in large measure, are the result of effective principals who differ from typical and non-effective principals. Effective principals typically emphasize instructional concerns as priorities for their schools, and they encourage active participation of teachers and other members of the school communities in

deciding priorities for school improvement. The claim is supported by the findings of studies designed to identify effective leadership styles of principals (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; DeBevoise, 1984; Owen & Steinhoff, 1978).

Some researchers, like Miller (1983) and Manasse (1983), have warned that leadership depends on the interaction between the leader, the group, and the environment. They distinctively argued that the concept of school-based improvement developed out of research conducted primarily in inner-city elementary schools. Some of the leadership characteristics that seem to have been important in those situations may be more strongly associated with the specific nature of the situations rather than with the basic or general leadership characteristics. The identification of, and emphasis on, this single primary factor (i.e., the leadership style) has led to the resurgence of attention to the importance of principals in school effectiveness. According to Miller (1983), educators are now looking beyond the experiences acquired by school principals to the possibilities of improving their leadership skills with the aid of current leadership and management concepts developed and tested both in the private and public sectors of business and institutions worldwide.

The late 1980s and early 1990s have experienced a period of legislative mandates to reform and restructure educational organizations. States such as Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania passed legislation for reorganization of the educational institutions. In each instance, the legislation or follow-up regulations included requirements for parental involvement in some form of participatory decision making.

This participatory decision-making notion, again not lacking for shortage of terms, turns the decision-making process over to the local school. The 1989 Chicago Public Schools experiment represented a serious attempt to change the business of schooling by empowering Local School Councils (comprised of parents, local residents, and school faculty) to hire and fire principals, to consider and adopt curricula, and to modify schedules and other routines of school life (Easton, 1991).

Cotton (1992) has concluded that despite the variety of terms and approaches, there is general agreement between educators on certain aspects of school-based management. She notes that the common threads include a shift of authority from central offices to local sites with the individual school faculty and constituency as the primary decision-making agents (Cotton, 1992). In her characterization of site-based management, she believes that this type of management:

- (a) is a form of district organization;
- (b) alters the governance of education;
- (c) represents a shift of authority toward decentralization;
- (c) represents a shift of authority toward decentralization;
- (d) identifies the school as the primary unit of educational change;
- (e) moves increased decision-making power to the local site.

As indicated previously in this chapter, site-based management has become the clarion call of reformers. There was a time when the school was not part of a structure called "school district" or "school system". It was very much part of the local community, integrated intimately into the fabric of daily life. Just about anything of significance in shared community life recognized the school as a focal point. This is not quite the case today, especially in the urban environment.

The April 29, 1996, issue of Time Magazine graphically portrays one of the complexities of the issues within the urban educational milieu. It focuses on the desegregation and integration issues in most large American cities. After two decades of progress toward integration, the article contends that the separation of Black children in American schools is on the rise and, in fact, fast

approaching the levels of the 1970s before the first school bus rolled at the order of the court. The article further notes: "Nationally, fully a third of Black public school students attend schools where the enrollment is 90% to 100% minority--that is, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. In the Northeast, the country's most segregated region, half of all Black students attend such schools" (Kunen & Lukas, 1996). The combination of legal revisionism and residential segregation is effectively ending America's bold attempt to integrate the public schools. Although the researcher believes in the principle of desegregation and integration of schools by race and class, it is not the purpose of this study to engage in the debate. The purpose of this study is to ascertain if the restructuring mandated by the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 represents change or progress toward pursuing its goals, including improvement of student performance. In reference to the same issue regarding the improvement of student performance, a Boston school official has stated that: "Our task is to educate the kids who are here, instead of yearning for those who have left" (Kunen & Lukas, 1996).

During this time, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was also involved in bringing together educational research and reform proposals to move toward legislative action in the field of education. The Education Reform Act

was enacted in June of 1993 with the requirements that a common core of learning be established, curriculum frameworks essential to the common core be developed, learning outcomes based on the frameworks be established, school finance be reconsidered, and school personnel be involved in continuing professional development.

Another major aspect of the Education Reform Act was the mandate that each school in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts must convene a School Council which would, in collaboration with the principal of the school:

- (a) examine the programs and policies of the school;
- (b) develop a School Improvement Plan which would improve student performance;
- (c) create a professional development plan;
- (d) allocate appropriate funds for professional development;
- (e) increase parental involvement; and
- (f) restructure a welcoming school environment.

Section 59C of the Act, which has concentrated on specific membership requirements, states that each Council "should be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community" (Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993). Idealistically, if such a section of the Act is going to be mandated properly, school leadership must see a School Improvement Plan which is suitable to the needs of its faculty and its students.

To many schools across the State, the School Council was a totally innovative concept, as was the creation and

implementation of a School Improvement Plan (SIP). Some had in place informal advisory groups. Others had parental groups functioning as advisory boards in areas such as Chapter I and/or Special Education. A few had parental boards that worked with superintendents or school departments in specific areas; and an even lesser number had School Councils that were prescribed either by school committees or by collective bargaining agreements. In the latter category, the teacher contract in the Springfield Public School System (which was implemented for the 1992-1993 school year) had an entire section (Article 6, A-F) defining the makeup, duties, and responsibilities of a School Council in each building.

The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 has produced major and potentially significant new sets of players and activities in every school in the State. The present study represents an effort to provide a better understanding of the process and impact of this initiative in its first three years. The study further emphasizes the process and accomplishment of School Councils in selected urban communities.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of, and roles played

by, School Councils in complying with the mandates set forth in the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. The study was also proposed to investigate the effectiveness of the current policies and practices of School Councils in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts. The study further attempted to evaluate the perceptions of the School Council members in certain urban communities regarding the extent to which they are successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act as a result of involvement in the development and allocation of a profound school budget aimed to fulfill the accomplishment of a comprehensive School Improvement Plan.

The mandate requires that each school have a School Council which will, in conjunction with the school principal, examine the issue of student performance and formulate a School Improvement Plan which will improve said performance. According to the mandate's initiatives, each School Council should assume additional responsibilities of designing a professional development plan for the school faculty, allocating funds for such a plan, enhancing the role of parents and community representatives in the school activities, and creating a welcoming environment in the school.

The regulations are specific to the Council membership in that they require participation by the principal, parents (selected by a parent group) in parity with professional personnel, teachers (selected by teachers), other persons representing business and community, and student representatives at the secondary level. A further stipulation is that the Council shall be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community.

To develop a better understanding of School Council dynamics, this study gathered data from a selected number of Councils about: (a) the composition of the Council; (b) members' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities; (c) who develops the agenda and what issues are included; (d) how the decision-making process is conducted; (e) how that process was originally defined; and (f) who maintains the leadership on the Council. The study further examined: (a) how each School Improvement Plan was developed; (b) how the school needs were defined; (c) how the student performance data was measured and refined; (d) what input members had in regard to school budget and personnel; and (e) how members participated in planning for more parental involvement and in creating a "welcoming environment". Information was also sought as to each School Council's role in cultivating the professional development plan for the school faculty.

Schools selected for this study were located in several urban cities (Springfield, Worcester, Lowell, Lynn, and Lawrence) in Massachusetts. These cities were selected for this study because they share some common characteristics and problems. They are all located in urban areas with diversity of populations and languages, have a high rate of family and student mobility, and have a high incidence of poverty. In addition, each city has the responsibility of assuring compliance with the mandates related to special education, bilingual education, and "Chapter I" programs when the participatory decision-making process is in force.

Through a structured interview process, the insight into the members' perception of effectiveness of Councils was gained through questions dealing with facilitating and problematic factors. These factors are related to the issues concerning the development of a School Improvement Plan; parental involvement in the budget control for professional development; and creation of a welcoming environment for students, parents, faculty, and administrators.

Significance of the Study

Implementation of the requirements set forth by the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 will have a

far-reaching effect on all towns and cities in the Commonwealth, and on the institutions of higher learning throughout the State. Many of the mandates impose requirements which are unfamiliar in terms of what has been done in the past. Examples of these mandates include recruitment, professional development, recertification, and School Councils. Other mandates call for changes or modifications to previous practices. Examples of these mandates include assessment of competencies and individual progress monitoring.

A study detailing how School Councils are organized, how their responsibilities are defined, and how they are carried out can be beneficial and important to every school and school system throughout the State. It can also be important to colleges and universities conducting research or assisting in the resource and training aspects of this process. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide useful information to policy makers who are interested in implementing school-based management as a key element in educational reform.

Research Questions

With regard to the statement of the problem and in accordance with the stated purpose of the study, the following research questions were formulated and then examined

through the use of quantitative and qualitative analyses appropriate to each question:

- Research Question 1: How do Council members perceive the current process of implementing policies and practices of School Councils in urban elementary schools in Massachusetts?
- Research Question 2: How do Council members perceive the current accomplishment of policies and practices of School Councils in urban elementary schools in Masaschusetts?
- Research Question 3: How do Council members in urban elementary schools of Massachusetts perceive the effectiveness of their current policies and practices in accomplishing their educational reform mission initiated to improve the quality of education for students?

Research Hypotheses

A vast majority of the current literature on human perception deals with diversified opinions concerning different issues. It is apparent throughout the existing literature that, depending upon the nature of the study, certain factors might influence the perceptions of survey participants regarding a particular question or a specific issue. Considering this is also true for the subjects

involved in the present study, and in conjunction with the statement of the problem, the following research hypotheses were formulated and then tested through the use of appropriate inferential statistics:

- Research Hypothesis 1: The more School Councils are involved in the allocation and development of the school budget, the more they will be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.
- Research Hypothesis 2: The more School Councils are involved in the development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan, the more they will be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.
- Research Hypothesis 3: The training of School Council members, in compliance with various goals and objectives of a School Improvement Plan, will significantly influence their effectiveness in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their respective school districts.
- Research Hypothesis 4: The School Councils of different urban school districts in

Massachusetts are equally successful in incorporating certain policies and procedures to secure more productive changes in their school's pedagogy, curriculum development, student achievement, student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extracurricular activities, school safety, class size, and other areas of school life.

Figure 1 is an illustrative representation of the stated research hypotheses which depicts the hypothesized relationships between accomplishment of the goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act and the School Council's involvement in: (a) school budget development; (b) development of a School Improvement Plan; (c) training for development of a School Improvement Plan; and (d) carrying out the policies and practices mandated by the Education Reform Act.

Definition of Terms

Except for the common concept, each study has its own definition of specific terms. The following technical and operational terms are used throughout this study:

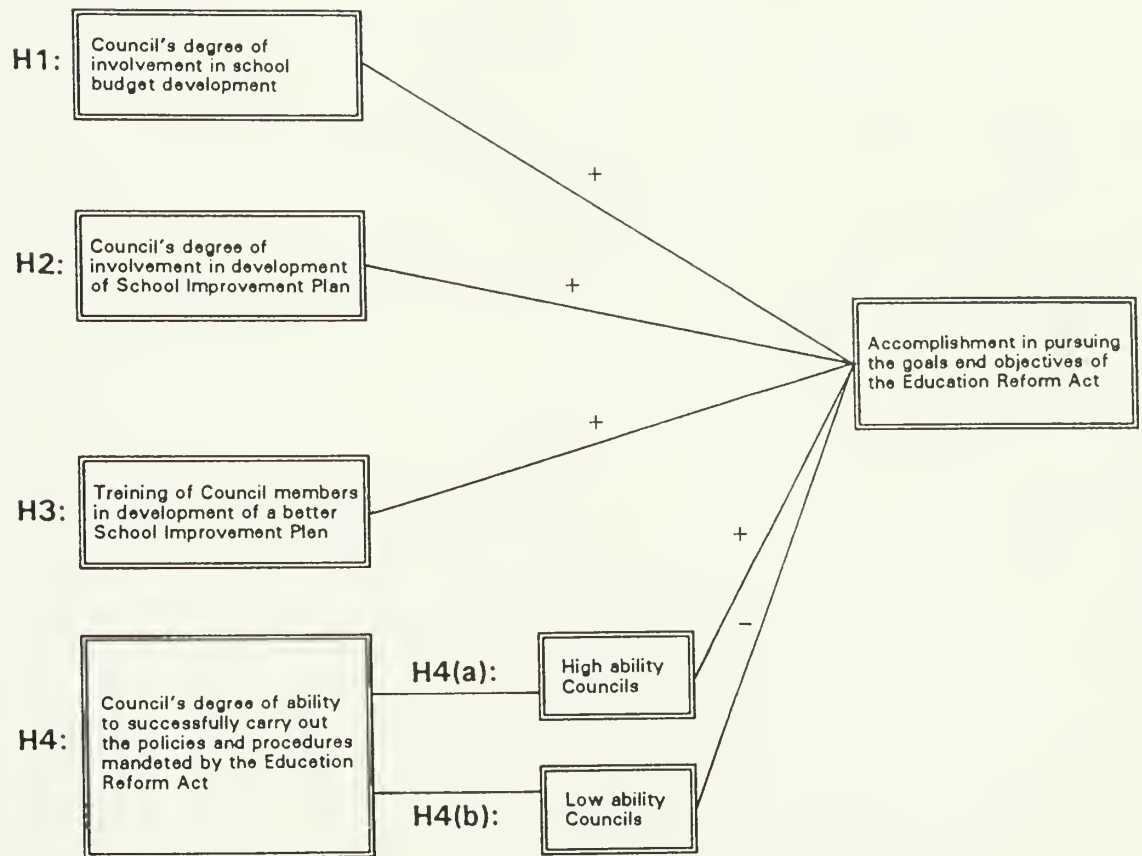


Figure 1. An illustrative representation of the stated research hypotheses.

- Dependent Variable: An outcome hypothesized to be affected by some other causes being statistically termed as independent variables (Slavin, 1992, p. 245).
- Descriptive Statistics: A variable hypothesized to cause some outcomes termed as dependent variables (Slavin, 1992, p. 247).
- Educational Evaluation: The process of delineating, obtaining, and providing necessary and useful information for decision making in education (Stufflebeam et al., 1971, p. 353).
- Formative Evaluation: Evaluation designed and used to improve a particular practice, especially when it is still in the process of development (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 591).
- Human Perception: The process of determining the meaning of what is sensed by the individual on a particular issue or in response to a specific question (Glover, Bruning, & Filbeck, 1983, p. 592).
- Independent Variable: A variable hypothesized to cause some outcomes termed as dependent variables (Slavin, 1992, p. 247).

- Inferential Statistics: Statistical procedures designed to permit researchers to generalize findings from a sample to the population from which the sample was drawn (Crowl, 1993, p. 411).
- Nonparametric Statistics: Statistics designed for use with cases that do not meet assumptions of parametric statistics (Slavin, 1992, p. 249).
- Parametric Statistics: Statistics designed for use with distributions that meet certain assumptions, such as interval approximating a normal distribution (Slavin, 1992, p. 250).
- Qualitative Analysis: Analysis of research findings based on verbal description versus numerical description (Crowl, 1993, p. 412).
- Qualitative Research: Research studies that emphasize an elaborate description of social or instructional settings (Slavin, 1992, p. 251).
- Quantitative Analysis: Analysis of research findings based on numerical description versus verbal description (Crowl, 1993, p. 413).
- Quantitative Research: Research studies that emphasize a numerical description of

a proposed phenomenon (Slavin, 1992, p. 251).

- Reliability of a Survey Instrument: The degree to which an instrument consistently measures whatever it is intended to measure (Slavin, 1992, p. 252).
- Summative Evaluation: Evaluation designed to determine the merit, the worth, or both of a developed practice and to make implications and recommendations regarding its adoption, implementation, and widespread use (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 599).
- Validity of a Survey Instrument: The degree to which an instrument actually measures the concept it is supposed to measure (Slavin, 1992, p. 255).

Research Outline

The following outline describes a summary of the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze the data, to make interpretation of the study results, and to present the findings and conclusions:

- (1) Permissions to conduct the study were obtained from the researcher's dissertation advisor, the superintendent of each

school district, and the principal of each participating school.

- (2) Lowell, Lynn, Springfield, and Worcester were the four urban school districts from the State of Massachusetts selected to participate in this study.
- (3) The subjects for the study were School Council members from five elementary schools in each of the four urban school districts participating in the study.
- (4) A research questionnaire was developed by the researcher and distributed by each principal to their School Council members to express their perceptions of the process and accomplishment in compliance with the Massachusetts Education Reform Act.
- (5) Personal interviews were also arranged with six volunteers who were willing to participate in the study.
- (6) The data obtained from the returned questionnaires were transcribed to a mainframe computer for processing, programming, and statistical analyses.
- (7) The research questions and hypotheses involved in the study were examined through

the use of appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical procedures.

- (8) General conclusions were drawn and implications were suggested based on the significant findings of the study.
- (9) A number of recommendations were made to the school systems, school districts, and School Councils regarding the process and accomplishment of projected goals and objectives of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act.
- (10) Several suggestions for further research were made to future researchers who might be interested in conducting other studies related to this particular topic.

Organization of the Study

In accordance with the research outline, this dissertation is organized and presented into the following chapters:

Chapter I: This introductory chapter includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, research hypotheses, definition of terms, research outline, and organization of the study.

Chapter II: This chapter presents a review of the literature pertinent to the topic, including the history of school-based decision making; definition and description of school-based decision making and shared decision making; introduction of selected models, structures, and styles; and conditions for effectiveness of site-based management councils. A summary of the literature review is presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter III: This chapter covers a detailed description of the research methodology, including the research design, the research population and subjects for the study, development of the survey instrument and interview questions, data collection procedures, treatment of the data, limitations fo the study, and preliminary assumptions. A summary of the methods and procedures is presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter IV: This chapter presents the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data, including a descriptive analysis to provide answers to the research questions, an inferential analysis to test the research hypotheses, and a qualitative approach to analyze the data collected through the open-ended items of the questionnaire as well as those collected through personal interviews. A summary of the significant findings is presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter V: This final chapter presents a summary of the study, general conclusions and implications based on the significant findings, suggestions for future research, as well as several recommendations to the school systems, school districts, and School Councils regarding the process and accomplishment of the mandated goals and objectives of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993.

C H A P T E R I I

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Review Strategy

This chapter will review previous research and current literature pertinent to this research study's topic, with a special focus in the area of school-based management. All literature reviewed in this chapter are based on primary sources with the most current and informative materials available on the research topic. Although there are many articles, manuals, and reports written on the subject, little effort has been made to coordinate the materials. There is also a paucity of studies focusing on perceptions of School Councils regarding the process and accomplishment of the mandated Education Reform Acts.

This chapter is organized to cover the following related areas of interest: (1) the history of school-based decision making; (2) descriptions of school-based decision making and shared decision making; (3) related models, structures, and styles; and (4) conditions for effectiveness of site-based management councils. A summary of the review is also presented at the end of the chapter.

History of School-Based Decision Making

The movement to site-based management and its concept of shared decision making is not a new phenomenon. It is a recurrent reform which surfaces periodically, particularly when public education is under fire (Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990). Currently, school-based management has resurfaced as a prominent form of school governance under the impetus of legislated educational reform mandates in a number of states, including Connecticut, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

For decades, proposals to delegate decision-making authority to subunits of school districts or to individual sites and proposals to distribute that authority among various combinations of administrators, teachers, parents, and community representatives have been enacted, rescinded, and reenacted throughout the United States.

This researcher, as Principal of the DeBerry Inner City Learning Center in Springfield, Massachusetts, during the school years 1970-1982, managed to create a parent/community council that participated in the shared decision-making process to the extent of interviewing prospective staff members, bringing in entirely different reading/language arts programs, and setting discipline and class management standards, etc. Also, the parent/community

council participated in the selection process for the Principal of the Inner City Learning Center.

A review of the movements to promote shared decision making, decentralization, site-based management, and the like, indicates that such movements occur during times of stress in the educational environment. Public dissatisfaction with the academic achievement or court or legislative mandates (e.g., desegregation) and other political activities tend to generate movements to "reform" school governance. For such reasons and many other events, the past two decades have experienced many educational reforms across the nation. As stated by Snider (1988), it is no coincidence that the legislature in Illinois enacted an education reform bill shortly after the Secretary of Education, William Bennett, described Chicago as the "worst school district in the country" (Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990). It is interesting to note that the legislation revising the governance structure in the Chicago schools was strikingly similar to legislation which had been enacted in the 1970s by the Illinois legislature for the same purpose.

Dade County in Florida reinstituted a school-based management program that had been in place between 1973 and 1981 as a response to public demand for education overhaul (Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990). Kentucky in 1990 and Kansas in 1992 enacted legislative mandates calling for

educational improvement and mandating school-based management as the decision-making process in schools.

The Los Angeles Unified School District has a decentralization plan which was developed in agreement with and direct participation of the United Teachers of Los Angeles. This decentralization plan was developed on the basis of a two-step progressive approach from shared decision making to school-based management, and in which the union steward serves as the co-chair of the School Council.

The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 called for the establishment of a new core curriculum and standards to fulfill the educational needs of individual students and individual schools. In supporting the philosophy of school-based management, the Act mandated each school to develop a "School Improvement Plan" in cooperation with the School Council and the school principal.

School-Based and Shared Decision Making

Stewart Purkey, in his 1990 commentary focusing on several studies of school-based management, shared his strong view of differentiating between movements for shared decision making and those for teacher empowerment. The latter, although strongly emphasizing shared decision making and site-based management, grew from a different stimulus than did those of education reform and legislative

mandate plans. The Task Force on Teaching as a Profession of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986) called on local school districts to find alternative solutions for providing teachers with a greater opportunity in school decision making. Similarly, the 1987 National Governors' Association Task Force called for developing a school-site management system that "respects the professional judgment of teachers" (Center for Policy Research, 1991). A report of the National Education Association in 1988 also maintained that site-based decision-making programs offer many opportunities for participation of local associations in accomplishment of educational reforms. These reports and many empirical studies seem to base nationwide support for implementation of school-based decision-making programs.

Throughout the literature, several terms pertaining to participatory decision making are used interchangeably (almost synonymously) and add to confusion in writings rather than clarity. For instance, Malen, Ogawa, and Krantz (1990) have stated that "school-based management can be reviewed conceptually as a formal alteration of governance structures as a form of decentralization that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as the primary means through which improvements might be stimulated and sustained."

Peterson Del Mar (1994) differentiates the following considerations: "School-site councils are becoming a key part of school reform across the United States. Like school-based management, a closely related but not identical practice, site councils offer an attractive array of possibilities: broadly based, democratic decision making; enhanced sensitivity to specific school climates; and widely shared responsibility. Site councils appear to be a beacon of hope as schools wrestle with declining public support and rising social problems." It is further stated that the presence of school-site councils in no way guarantees successful school reform; and that such councils may do more harm than good if they lack the support of principals, teachers, administrators, and the community at large.

Conley (1993) commented that "restructuring is a broad reform movement that seeks to improve student learning through a variety of structural changes, such as varied learning environments, curriculum integration, and performance-based measurements." He believes that School Councils can be very active and effective without taking over decisions that have been made by central office staff or the school board. In his view, both imply a decentralization of authority; school-based management focuses on decentralization within the district; and site councils focus on "decentralization within the school".

School-site councils and school-based management are closely related.

School-based management, according to Lindelow and Heynderick (1989), is a system of administration in which the school site is the primary unit of decision making. It shifts focus of control from central office administrators to the school level. It entails redistributing power within the district, but not necessarily within the school.

In another notion of school-based management, Lindelow and Heynderick (1989) have stated that "school-based management is more of an 'administrative' decentralization that preserves the notion of professional control of education." They believe that school-based management can occur with or without school-site councils; and that school-site councils can occur with or without school-based management. They also believe that school-site councils do not necessarily affect the distribution of power and authority within the district.

As indicated by Weston (1993), the school-based decision-making process in Kentucky Public Schools has provided parents, teachers, and principals with substantial control over how each school operates. Working through a council composed of the principal, three teachers, and two parents, key decisions are made regarding the development of school improvement and academic achievement of students.

According to Peterson Del Mar (1994), school-site councils can be defined broadly as a group of stakeholders (staff, students, parents, and community members) who meet regularly to discuss and propose solutions for their schools. He notes that this definition conceals as much as it reveals for it leaves unanswered the crucial questions of authority. Are these councils advisory, or can they mandate policy? Are they essentially run by the principal, or can they override or even fire the principal? While these questions are crucial, answers should be reflected on the line of duties assumed by each council in each district.

Nearly all of the literature advocating site-based management, participatory decision making, and all of the "how to" manuals (Kansas, Kentucky, etc.) listed usually cite goals that include increased morale, cooperation, feeling of ownership of decisions, and ability to have an effect on curriculum and program.

Lindelow and Heynderick (1989) list the following three major advantages of participatory decision making: (a) higher quality decisions; (b) higher employee satisfaction; and (c) improved relationships between staff and management. They also believe that these initiatives should be considered in any type of decision making.

Although Hansen and Marburger (1989) agreed upon many advantages of participatory decision making, they also

believed that this type of decision making rests on several assumptions about human nature and human relations. These assumptions are listed as follows:

- (a) People are trustworthy.
- (b) People are most apt to change if they are involved in that change.
- (c) Those closest to implementation are the best qualified to determine its course.
- (d) Local decisions can be made most effectively without bureaucratic interference.
- (e) It is easier to change people's behavior than their belief; so if the structures are changed, behavior is apt to follow.
- (f) People are less antagonistic when they work together.
- (g) The necessary resources for school improvement already exist in the school community.
- (h) Parents are important to their children's education.
- (i) Student involvement in decision making facilitates their socialization into responsible participation in a democratic society.

Much of the literature describing site-based management or shared decision making assigns to the process responsibilities for the outcomes of the process. Robertson

and Kwong (1993) differentiated between the two, but ascribed responsibilities as: (1) Shared decision making gives a limited range of decisions in the areas of staff development and training, student discipline guidelines, scheduling of school activities, guidelines for the use of school equipment, and some local budget funds; and (2) School-based management allows schools to be able to take charge of managing virtually any aspect of their operation, even to the point of applying for waivers of existing policies.

Robertson and Kwong (1993) assert that while solid empirical evidence to support the efficacy of the educational reform is lacking, much has been written about the theory and the expected outcomes of decentralization. They further assert that literature specifically points to several rationales for school decentralization which are important to be taken into consideration:

- (a) Schools would be more responsible for their own performance, thereby motivating teachers, parents, administrators, and community to work together.
- (b) Participatory management research indicates that workers are more satisfied and more productive. This is especially likely to happen if information, knowledge,

and rewards are decentralized along with power (Lawler, Mohrman, & Mohrman, 1991).

- (c) Decentralization provides an opportunity to secure a greater range of participation by individuals at the local school level.

Weston (1993), in defining site-based management, emphasizes a number of functions as characteristics of the decision-making process. The following presents a list of these functions:

- (a) Make policy and implement practices to enhance achievement and meet the Education Reform Act goals;
- (b) Make policy procedures for determining alignment with state standards, technology use, and program appraisal;
- (c) Consult with school principal before he or she decides to select persons to fill other vacancies;
- (d) Determine the number of people in each job classification;
- (e) Make discipline and classroom management policy;
- (f) Select textbooks;
- (g) Select instructional materials;
- (h) Select student support services;

- (i) Select new principals;
- (j) Make curriculum policy;
- (k) Make staff assignment policy;
- (l) Make school schedule policy;
- (m) Make instructional practice policy;
- (n) Make extracurricular policy;
- (o) Participate in school-based decision-making process; and
- (p) Participate in evaluation of decision-making outcomes.

While many studies describe aspects of school-based management, the vast majority of researchers (Cotton, 1992; Goodlad, 1984; Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990; and others) have maintained that true school-based management can exist only when the individual units can have decision input into the three areas of budget, personnel, and program. Proponents of school-based management assert that by altering the decision-making process in this way participants will be able to: (a) enhance employee morale and motivation; (b) foster implementation of instructional improvements; (c) promote innovation in the instructional processes (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986); and (d) strengthen the schoolwide planning process (Kirst, 1984).

Models, Structures, and Styles

In a descriptive report issued by the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance (Easton et al., 1993), different school-based management governance approaches were identified and described. Members of the Panel had attended meetings of school-management boards and randomly selected Chicago schools, and described governance procedures based on two contributing variables--participation and motions. Members of the Panel also described limited governance boards as those in which there was low participation rate and few motions with meetings controlled by the school professionals, particularly the principals.

Moderate-governance boards are described as those in which the variable on participation and motions were in a range from medium-low to medium-high, with council members not being active leaders except in crisis situations (Easton et al., 1993). Principals in such systems tend to bring the proposals, provide the information, and take charge of the discussions. Easton et al. and the Panel state that this may be the most typical of the governance styles in Chicago.

Balance-governance boards had moderately high scores on both participation and motion activity. Easton and his associates (1993) indicate that "these Councils were

true leaders in their schools, and they sometimes took active stands on community issues as well" (p. 5). In these councils, principals and chairpersons shared leadership, with parents and community representatives playing a vital role. There was trust and a sharing of information with productive meetings and efficient decision making. Easton and his associates (1993) believe this to be the best of the school governance models. However, only 21 percent of the schools studied fit this description.

Excessive-governance boards were characterized with high participation rates and many proposed motions (Easton et al., 1993). Such boards were very active and played an important, if not well-defined, role in the school governance process. Chairpersons were council leaders who encouraged greater parent participation. There were, however, long-standing antagonistic relationships between councils and principals, and members did not trust each other. Meetings were long and numerous with complaints of lack of information. Easton and his associates (1993) evaluated this category and found it as generally counter-productive.

Currently, 156 schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District are (or were in 1993) engaged in some form of school governance. Los Angeles makes a clear-cut distinction between "shared decision-making management" and "school-based management". As indicated earlier in

this chapter, school-based management is a system of administration in which the school site is the primary unit of decision making; whereas shared decision-making management is a system in which decisions are shared among various combinations of teachers, administrators, parents, and community representatives. All schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District are currently involved in the decentralization process.

While decentralization movements across the country have occurred for a variety of reasons (legislative mandate, Department of Education policies, collective bargaining, etc.), the Los Angeles decentralization occurred as a result of the 1989 collective bargaining agreement between the school district and the United Teachers of Los Angeles. It defines a two-step process with shared decision making as the first step. In this step, each school elects a local leadership composed of school teachers, administrators, parents, classified personnel, business and community members, and in some cases students. Representatives are elected annually or participate through ex-officio status. Shared decision-making councils have responsibility for five areas: staff development, student discipline guidelines, scheduling of school activities, use of school equipment, and some local budget funds. In 1993, approximately fifty percent of the

schools in the district were governed under the shared decision-making model.

Schools wishing to move into the second stage (school-based management) must submit a proposal delineating the changes to be made and how the changes are going to improve student achievement. Schools in this phase are proposed to be able to take charge of managing nearly all aspects of school operations. Such proposals must be approved by the Board of Education, the Union, and a central council. The distinction made between shared decision making and school-based management models is important to note, because the two terms are used interchangeably in most of the literature in this area.

Conditions for Effectiveness

In an article, titled "Making School-Based Management Work," published in the February, 1995, issue of Educational Leadership, Odden and Wohlstetter set forth some conditions for the successful operation of school-based management. Schools effectively operating under school-based management were able to reorganize themselves to accomplish a vision--they were able to restructure the curriculum and instruction. They describe successful schools as having to meet two necessary conditions:

(a) people at the school site must have genuine authority

over the school budget, personnel, and curriculum; and (b) such authority must be empowered to introduce changes that directly affect teaching and learning. In order to be effective, they state that schools needed the essential resources of professional development and training, adequate information to make informed decisions, and a reward system to recognize improved performances. Vital to each school's success is a curriculum framework and effective leadership by the principal. However, less successful schools were those in which these factors did not exist and the council was stuck on assuming power and housekeeping issues. Should the principal have a veto? Who has access to the copy machine?

Some researchers list other reasons for difficulty in the successful operation of participatory decision making. Concerning this problem, Eastwood and Tallerico (1990) ask a number of questions including: (1) Will the district be willing and able to offer the necessary development and release time for staff to be effective team members?; (2) Will district administrators truly accept and work with collaborative decision making?; and (3) Do staff members realize the complex and lengthy nature of the school improvement process?

The process of school site councils does not guarantee they will be effective agents for school reform. According to Conley (1993), "the problem is when the site council

becomes a school-based school board that focuses on school governance rather than school improvement, they may simply add another layer of initiative staffing bureaucracy." Conley (1993) describes other difficulties such as ill-defined agendas, lack of training, authoritarian principals, factionalism (staff, parents, community representatives, and other personnel). The previously described Easton and associates (1993) study in Chicago defines many of the difficulties to success in the process. The central goal of the process in each instance, where the process has been established, is to improve student learning. However, in many instances where the councils are teacher dominated, the focus is on teacher working conditions rather than on teacher efficacy which, according to Conley (1993), "are closely related, but they are not synonymous."

In an article published in the Oregon School Employees Association Bulletin, Gest (1993) stated that training is essential in the areas of group processing, communication, decision making, resolving disputes, and active listening. In regard to the same issue, Hansen and Marburger (1989) suggested that training should consist of two days immediately on becoming a council member, with an annual retreat for all council members (whenever possible) at a site away from the school.

According to Malen, Ogawa, and Krantz (1990), there is little evidence that school-based management alters

influence relationships, renews school organizations, or develops the qualities of academically effective schools. They list other possible reasons for ineffectiveness of the school-based decision-making style, such as parents view their roles on the council more as ancillary advisors or pro-forma endorsers rather than as major policy makers.

Another problem of the school-based management style, according to a study by the Strategic Management Research Center (1988), is that agendas are usually set by principals with meetings often being a top-down presentation of information. As an example, during discussions, teachers normally tend to follow the supervisor's lead and often approve "what the principal wants". Obviously such an approach will not be effective, since it lacks necessary input from many school members.

With each of the 156 schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District participating in either shared decision making or school-based management, Robertson and Kwong (1993) conducted the study of diversity and its impact on the decision-making process. The diversity characteristics examined were gender, ethnicity, experience base (time as council member and time in association with the Los Angeles Unified School District), and role (the constituent group represented). The study reviewed the effectiveness of school councils in the areas of

decision making, problem solving, non-educator involvement, as well as council effectiveness and council ineffectiveness.

The results of the Robertson and Kwong (1993) study indicated "council decision making is perceived to be better when there is more heterogeneity in terms of roles held and more homogeneity in terms of Los Angeles Unified School District tenure. Both gender and ethnic diversity have a marginally negative impact on Council decision-making effectiveness."

Studies conducted by Dade County, Florida (1989), the National Education Association (1986), and McLeece and Malen (1987) indicate an initial energizing and enthusiasm by site-based management participants, and the concept is usually well received by participants. Enthusiasm at the onset is often mitigated by negative factors over a period of time. Such factors include the time-consuming nature of the process; confusion and anxiety over new roles and responsibilities; and stress and resentment caused by the conflict between high expectations on the one hand and the feeling of having only modest influence in decision making on the other.

The Strategic Management Research Center (1988) suggests that Councils serve as vehicles for sharing information, airing complaints and concerns, diffusing potentially contentious issues, minimizing irritations, and

addressing ongoing problems. It was noted that while Council interactions can have a calming, harmonizing effect on participants, there is virtually no evidence that these informational sessions and interpersonal exchanges offset the strains previously described.

In general, site-based management council members exert little influence over budgets (Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, 1990); have only moderate control over personnel; became increasingly frustrated with process (Easton et al., 1993); and are confused by role factors. Teachers normally tend to look to the principal for leadership in management and educational issues; parents usually view their role more as ancillary advisors or pro-forma endorsers than as major policy makers; and Councils, in general, tend not to deal with the major issues.

Summary

In summary, the literature delineates factors which increase the possibility for successful school-based management, and also defines the negative conditions leading to less successful Councils. To the extent that the success factors are present, the Councils felt a growing degree of success; and to the extent that the negative factors are present, increasing frustration and lack of success were manifest. The literature also differentiates

school-based management and shared decision-making styles based on the assertion that: (1) shared decision making gives a limited range of decisions in the areas of staff development and training, student discipline guidelines, scheduling of school activities, guidelines for the use of school equipment, and some local budget funds; and (2) school-based management allows schools to be able to take charge of managing virtually any aspect of their operation, even to the point of applying for waivers of existing policies.

A vast majority of the researchers have maintained that true school-based management can exist only when the individual units can have decision input into the three areas of budget, personnel, and curriculum. Proponents of school-based management assert that by altering the decision-making process in this way participants will be able to: (a) enhance employee morale and motivation; (b) foster implementation of instructional improvements; (c) promote innovation in the instructional processes; and (d) strengthen the schoolwide planning process. Perceptions of successful school-based management occur when people at the site have genuine control over budget, personnel, and curriculum; and such authority is used to introduce changes that directly affect teaching and learning. Additionally, an effective school-based management model provides opportunity for professional

development and training with a system of rewards to recognize improved performance. In implementing a school-based management model, there needs to be a profound curriculum framework and effective leadership.

C H A P T E R I I I

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The methods and procedures presented in this chapter include the research design, target population, sample selection procedure, data collection procedure, development of the survey instruments, method of conducting personal interviews, treatment of the data, limitations of the study, and preliminary assumptions. Finally, a summary of the methodology is presented at the end of the chapter.

Research Design

The purpose of descriptive research is to collect necessary data for testing hypotheses and answering questions concerning the current status of the subjects of the study (Gay, 1987). Descriptive studies are generally concerned with evaluating attitudes, perceptions, opinions, conditions, procedures, and demographic data (Gay, 1987). This study is descriptive in its nature because it is primarily designed to collect data for testing the research hypotheses and providing answers to the research questions by evaluating the perceptions of the survey participants regarding their accomplishment in developing a School Improvement Plan in compliance with the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993.

The research was conducted based on a case study design which is appropriate due to its uniqueness for any interpretation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the case study report is ideally suited to the naturalistic paradigm. It is an advantage especially when ongoing behavior is being documented to employ case study techniques so that the researcher can observe the possible changes in each subject's behavior. The case study also allows for method triangulation. It is expedient to utilize the concept of triangulation with data collection modes including interview, questionnaire, and program document. This approach is commonly used to determine the degree of convergence related to the various sources of data.

This research is a multiple-case design or a comparative study which involves School Councils in four urban school districts in Massachusetts. The purpose is to allow for some generalized findings to emerge. Yin (1984) explains that replication logic is employed in multiple-case studies. This implies that similar results are predicted for each of the four cases that were analyzed. Yin (1984) further defines replication study logic as: (a) literal replication which predicts similar results; and (b) theoretical replication which produces contrary results, but for predictable reasons (p. 49).

Due to the nature of this study and in accordance with the majority of the studies of this nature, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were utilized to analyze the data collected through the survey instrument and the resulting interviews. The following sections explain the methods used to collect and analyze the data for this study.

Quantitative Design

The quantitative approach is used in this study to describe the population sampled, to analyze the responses to the measuring items of the questionnaire, and to test the significance of selected variables in the perceptions of the survey participants. The descriptive analysis of the data was achieved by presenting a profile of the survey participants and by examining the research questions. The inferential analysis of the data was performed by testing the null hypotheses derived from the research hypotheses.

In supporting the quantitative approach, Crowl (1993) indicates that it is essentially used to provide a numerical and statistical description of one or more population variables. This approach involves descriptive and inferential analyses depending upon the nature of the data. Descriptive analysis is basically used by researchers to meaningfully describe many parametric values with a small number of numerical indices; whereas

inferential analysis is typically used to determine how likely it is that the findings derived from a sample are the same as those that would have been derived from the entire population (Gay, 1987).

Qualitative Design

The qualitative approach is used in this study to provide responses of the survey participants to the open-ended items of the questionnaire and to present the results of interviews. The qualitative approach is typically used to provide a narrative description of particular phenomena as they are (Cowl, 1993). As indicated by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), qualitative research has the following major properties: (a) the natural setting is the data source and the researcher is the key data collection instrument; (b) it attempts primarily to describe and secondarily to analyze; (c) the concern is with process, that is, with what has transcribed, as much as with outcome; (d) its data are analyzed inductively, as in putting together the parts of a puzzle; and (e) it is essentially concerned with what things mean.

Research Population

The population for this study included a sample of Council members of selected urban public elementary schools in the State of Massachusetts. Each School Council

consisted of the school principal, the school teachers, parents of students attending the school, and business and community representatives. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act requires Councils to be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community.

Sample Selection Procedure

The sample for this study was selected from among the School Council members of urban public elementary schools in Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, Springfield, and Worcester, Massachusetts. These communities share some common characteristics and problems. They are all urban areas with diversity of populations and languages, have a high rate of family and student mobility, and have a high incidence of poverty. In addition, each has the responsibility of assuring compliance with the mandates related to special education and bilingual education programs when the participatory decision-making process is taking place. Lawrence decided not to participate in the study. The number of target elementary schools in Springfield, Worcester, Lowell, and Lynn were 29, 28, 8, and 8, respectively.

From each of the four selected districts, five elementary schools were chosen randomly using computer-oriented

software to avoid any bias in sampling and representation. The participating elementary schools were those with Kindergarten through at least fifth grade.

Survey Instruments

A research questionnaire and a combination of structured and unstructured interviews were designed as the survey instruments for this study. The following sections provide details of developing the questionnaire and the structured interviews.

The Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide descriptive information about the work of the Councils and to determine their opinions regarding the effectiveness of different aspects of their work. Particular attention was directed to the roles ascribed to the various Council membership. Further, the questionnaire seeks to establish the boundaries and direction of the interview. The questionnaire items were derived from two sources: (a) the content of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, and (b) selected references in the literature reviewed, especially those related to Council leadership and dynamics. As a result, an initial questionnaire was drafted by the researcher and reviewed by the Director of Research in a major urban school system. A pilot study was also

conducted using five subjects to determine whether or not some items were ambiguous.

The survey instrument was then validated by comparing responses from two non-sampled schools, one known to function effectively and one known to be struggling. Respondents' answers to the question of "In general, how would you rate the effectiveness of your School Council?", which was based on the Likert-type scale (1 for "Very Effective"; 2 for "Mostly Effective"; 3 for "Somewhat Effective"; and 4 for "Not Very Effective"), were used to determine if the instrument would discriminate. The means of five respondents from the two School Councils judged to be more effective apriori was 1.8, a scale position between "Very Effective" and "Mostly Effective". The mean of nine respondents from the two School Councils thought to be less effective was 3.0, representing a scale position of "Somewhat Effective". These findings indicated that the instrument discriminated significantly, and that this particular item of the questionnaire can serve as an indicator of the respondents' evaluation of their own School Council.

The validation also revealed two other questions that had significantly different responses from the two School Councils: (1) The School Council known to be more effective knew more why School Councils were part of educational reform; and (2) The more effective School

Council also had more influence over budget allocation and had created change in school safety. The final draft of the questionnaire was also reviewed by three university faculty for clarity and face validation. After a few other changes and corrections recommended by the faculty members, the final version of the questionnaire was approved by the researcher's dissertation committee chair as the survey instrument for collection of the data for this study (see Appendix A).

In accordance with the purpose of the study, the final revision of the questionnaire was organized into the following four parts:

Part I - General Information: This part consisted of four items asking the survey participants to furnish information regarding their gender, ethnic background, role on the School Council, and number of years served on the School Council.

Part II - The School Council Process: There were sixteen items included in this part seeking the perceptions of the survey participants regarding the process of the School Council on which they are currently serving.

Part III - The Accomplishments: In this part, there were twenty items searching the perceptions of the survey participants about their accomplishments in pursuing the policies and practices for development of a School Improvement Plan in compliance with the mandated

policies and procedures set forth in the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993.

Part IV - Respondent's Opinions: This part included five open-ended items seeking the opinions of the survey participants about: (a) factors that have facilitated their School Council's work; (b) barriers to the work of the School Council; (c) the most rewarding aspect of their participation on the School Council; (d) their general comments about the work of the School Council; and (e) whether or not they are willing to be interviewed on other issues related to School Councils.

The Interviews

The structured interview is a data collection technique utilized in naturalistic inquiry. During the interview, it is imperative to be observant and note expressions and non-verbal cues that are conveyed while the process is under way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Structured interviews are based on the concept of framing appropriate questions to find out information that is not known to the interviewer. Conversely, the unstructured interview does not include questions that have been formulated ahead of time. The unstructured interviews allow for the respondent's reactions to broad issues that may have shaped the relevance of the process, instead of relying upon the researcher's notion of relevance.

The formulation of an appropriate sequence of questions was based on the review of relevant literature and personal observations and experiences with participatory decision making. In accordance with the purpose of the study, the following seven major questions were formulated for the personal interviews:

- (1) What factors, in your opinion, have facilitated the work of your School Council?
- (2) What factors, in your opinion, may have been barriers or are barriers to the work of your School Council?
- (3) One of the tasks mandated by the Massachusetts Education Reform Act was to create a School Improvement Plan. How did your School Council move on accomplishing that task and what was the result?
- (4) School Councils were given some control over budgets and charged to allocate funds for the implementation of a School Improvement Plan:
 - (a) How much control does your Council have over the school budget?
 - (b) How much budget is being allocated to implement a School Improvement Plan?
 - (c) What specific items did your Council fund for implementation of the School Improvement Plan?

- (5) School Councils were charged to increase parental involvement. Besides having parents serve on the School Councils, what other means have you used or plan to use to increase parental involvement in your school?
- (6) School Councils were also asked to create a welcoming environment at their schools, in order to originate a positive climate characterized by tolerance and acceptance:
- (a) Have you investigated the climate at your school?
 - (b) Have you made any changes or plans that would enhance the welcoming environment?
- (7) What further comments or observations would you have to share regarding the School Councils based on your understanding of the goals of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act?

Audiotapes were used to accomplish a complete record of the dialogue. A verbatim transcript of each interview was created. This allowed for a systematic reconstruction of each interview, assuring completeness of thoughts. The written transcript provided an orderly sequence of the dialogue.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection was achieved through administering the questionnaire and conducting the structured interviews. Every effort has been made to have representation from the various constituent groups of the Council and from each district. The following two sections provide details of the procedures used for the data collection.

Administering the Questionnaire

Permission to collect the data from the School Councils was sought and granted from each superintendent of the four school districts (see Appendix B). A few weeks prior to the data collection, the researcher contacted each superintendent inviting his participation. After receiving approval from these superintendents, a letter was mailed to the principal of each school seeking his or her cooperation (see Appendix C). Following the approval of each school principal, preparations were made by the researcher to distribute the questionnaire by the school to each Council member. In order to assure consistency and uniformity in administering the survey, an envelope containing the questionnaire and a postage-paid envelope for returning the completed responses were mailed to each individual. The instructions part of the questionnaire provided the individuals with an assurance of anonymity and sought their cooperation to participate in the study

by completing the questionnaire. Anonymity of the responses was also promised to each school principal and his or her superintendent in order to assure more openness and better participation. Follow-up attempts, such as telephone communication and facsimile transmittal to each school, were also made to collect a sufficient number of questionnaires for data analysis. Of the total 228 questionnaires distributed to the target School Council members, 65 were completed and returned, resulting in a 28.5% response rate.

Conducting the Personal Interviews

Although ten survey participants volunteered to be interviewed, only six decided to participate. However, these volunteers were found to include representation from each district and each Council constituent group. The interviews were conducted at the individual work sites of each participant. The familiarity of the work environment aided in establishing an atmosphere free of tension and encouraged self assurance. Program literature, documents, and training materials were freely shared and discussed. The audiotaping of each session was not a detractor. There were seven initially formulated questions along with a number of follow-up questions during the interview as they related to each original question and based on the responses provided by the interviewees. These questions were

primarily formulated to seek an expanded understanding of certain items of the questionnaire. All interviews were audiotaped for a later transcription, analysis, and interpretation. In order to analyze the voluminous data collected, transcripts were read by the researcher and two other readers who were aware of the purpose of the study. Readers underscored sections of each transcript that they thought would add to the understanding of those Councils. Marked sections were categorized and highlighted in the results of the study.

Treatment of the Data

The data obtained from the returned questionnaires were coded numerically and then transcribed into a main-frame computer system for compilation and programming purposes. The most recent release of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie & Associates, 1996) was utilized in generating a computer program for tabulation and analysis of the data. The information from personal interviews was also transcribed and categorized for analysis and interpretation. Based on the quantitative and qualitative research design discussed previously, the responses were analyzed to: (a) provide a profile of the survey participants, (b) examine the research questions, (c) test the research hypotheses, and (d) evaluate the

perceptions of the survey participants regarding the process and accomplishment of the School Councils.

Quantitative Approach

Quantitative analysis of the data was approached through the use of descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. The descriptive analysis of the data was achieved using certain measures of central tendency and dispersion, including the mean and standard deviation of the ratings assigned by the survey participants to some measurable items of the questionnaire, as well as frequency distributions of the responses to each item. In addition to examining the research questions, a profile of the survey participants was presented by analyzing the demographic information included in the questionnaire. This profile seems to be necessary for the purpose of cross-validation and interpretation of the findings, because it makes it possible for the reader to relate the respondents' views based on their demographic background. The inferential analysis of the data was accomplished by testing the null hypotheses derived from the research hypotheses through the use of the Pearson Correlation technique, the t-test for independent means, and the Chi² test of comparison for nonparametric variables. The following sections provide the rationale for using each of the inferential statistics involved in the study.

The Pearson Correlation. The Pearson Correlation technique, along with its test of significance, was applied to test the first two hypotheses because this statistic is typically used to determine the extent to which two dependent variables (or pairs of measurements) are correlated. Investigators often use this statistic to predict the measure of one variable (criterion) from that of another (predictor). The value of this statistic ranges from -1 for a perfect inverse correlation to zero for no systematic relationship and +1 for a perfect positive correlation. A positive correlation indicates the larger the value of one variable, the larger the value of another. Inversely, a negative correlation indicates the larger the value of one variable, the smaller the value of another.

The T-Test. The third hypothesis was examined using the t-test for independent means because this test is typically designed to compare the mean scores of two independent groups on a criterion variable. The strategy of the t-test is to compare the "actual" mean difference observed with the difference "expected" by chance. In other words, the t-test determines whether the observed difference is sufficiently larger than a difference which would be expected by chance.

The Chi-Square. The final research hypothesis was examined using the Chi^2 test of comparison. This test was employed in this study because it is normally used to

compare relative frequency distribution of nonparametric variables. Nonparametric variables are considered to be nominal in nature which ought to be treated differently from parametric variables which are measurable.

Selection of the Level of Significance. In order to test the statistical hypotheses, it was necessary to select an appropriate level of significance relevant to the nature of the study. The level of significance is defined as the risk of error in generalization of the findings obtained from a sample to the population from which the sample had been drawn (Crowl, 1993). With respect to the common agreement among statisticians in adopting a level of significance for studies involving human perception, the 0.05 level of significance was also selected for testing the null hypotheses involved in this study. Conceptually, the 0.05 level of significance allows a maximum five percent risk of error and secures a minimum 95 percent confidence in generalizing the hypothesis results from the sample to the population.

Qualitative Approach

Qualitative analysis of the data was approached by coding, categorizing, and interpreting the responses provided by the survey participants to the open-ended items of the questionnaire as well as those resulting from personal interviews. For each item, the responses were

coded numerically and categorized based on the type and frequency of similar responses. Finally, the most significant comments and recommendations were presented both in a narrative form and based on their frequencies. In analyzing the personal interviews, the frequency of the identical responses given to a particular question by the survey participants was considered to be the most important reflections of the entire group feedback. Appendix D presents a sample transcript of an interview as well as the seven initial questions formulated for conducting personal interviews.

Limitations of the Study

The primary information-gathering process for this study was on the basis of distributing a questionnaire and conducting personal interviews with members of school-centered decision-making teams. Therefore, results are primarily drawn from self-report data of involved participants. The focus of the study is in larger urban area schools which have special challenges, including high parent mobility. A major limitation of this study is that many of the parent representatives who began the shared decision-making process may no longer be available to respond to the questionnaire or volunteer themselves for a personal interview. Another limitation of this study is

that the selected sample may not necessarily be a fair representation of the entire population of School Councils throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Since the target population of this study is limited to the urban elementary schools, any generalization of the findings should also be cautiously limited to the same population. Replication of this study is, therefore, recommended to include other populations within the system as well as the entire population of schools throughout the State of Massachusetts.

Preliminary Assumptions

Like many studies seeking human perceptions, the scope of this study is also based on the following preliminary assumptions:

1. The questionnaire developed for the study has a sufficient degree of content validity to allow reasonably accurate information reflecting the genuine perceptions of the survey participants.
2. The responses of the participating Council members to each item of the questionnaire, as well as those through interviews, are reflecting their accurate perceptions and without any personal bias.
3. The primary and secondary sources used throughout this dissertation are both accurate and reliable.

Summary

The methods and procedures used in the current study were discussed in this chapter. The data for the study were collected through administering a survey instrument and conducting personal interviews with selected Council members of four school districts in Massachusetts. Of the total 228 questionnaires distributed to the target Council members, 65 were completed and returned, resulting in a 28.5% response rate. The data obtained from the returned questionnaires were transferred into a mainframe computer system for programming and statistical analyses. The quantitative analysis of the data included both descriptive and inferential procedures. The descriptive analysis of the data was achieved using frequency distribution of the responses provided by the survey participants to the individual items of the questionnaire. The inferential analysis of the data was achieved by testing the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance and through the use of the correlation technique, the t-test for independent means, and the Chi^2 test of comparison. The qualitative analysis of the data was achieved by coding, categorizing, and interpreting the responses provided by the Council members to the open-ended items of the questionnaire as well as those collected through the personal interviews. For each question, the answers were analyzed

based on the type and frequency of similar responses. Whenever it seemed to be appropriate, comments of the respondents were quoted for further understanding of their feelings and their recommended solutions to specific problems. The following chapter presents an analysis of the data and interpretation of the findings.

C H A P T E R I V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected for this study through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis of the data is achieved by applying certain descriptive and inferential statistical procedures in order to: (a) provide a profile of the participating School Council members; (b) examine the research questions as they relate to the School Councils' process, accomplishments, and degree of effectiveness; and (c) test the research hypotheses regarding the effectiveness of the School Councils in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Massachusetts Educational Reform Act. Qualitative analysis of the data is based on the interpretation of the responses provided by the survey participants to the open-ended items of the questionnaire as well as those resulting from the personal interviews. In addition to the qualitative analysis, the respondents' comments are further categorized and presented based on frequency of the responses and as they relate to the purpose of the study. The findings are summarized at the end of the chapter.

Quantitative Analysis of the Data

In accordance with the research design, the quantitative findings are organized and presented into the following three sections: a profile of the participating Council members; examining the research questions; and testing the research hypotheses.

A Profile of the Participating Council Members

In this section, a profile of the participating Council members is presented in Table 1 based on the place of school districts they currently serve, role of the School Council, number of years on the School Council, ethnic background, and gender.

Place of Residence. Of the total 65 Council members who participated in this study, 21 (or 32.3%) were residing in Worcester, 20 (or 30.8%) were residing in Springfield, 16 (or 24.6%) were residing in Lowell, and the remaining 8 (or 12.3%) were residing in Lynn. These figures indicate that the proportion of Council members in each school district is a fair representation of the proportion of their populations.

Role on the School Council. A breakdown of the participating Council members according to their roles includes 28 (or 43.1%) teachers, 23 (or 35.4%) parents, 8 (or 12.3%) school administrators, and 6 (or 9.2%) business

Table 1
A Profile of the Participating Elementary
School Council Members

COUNCIL MEMBERS	NUMBER	PERCENT
Town:		
Lynn	8	12.3
Lowell	16	24.6
Springfield	20	30.8
Worcester	21	32.3
Role:		
Teacher	28	43.1
Parent	23	35.4
Administrator	8	12.3
Business/Community	6	9.2
Years:		
One year	19	29.2
Two years	17	26.2
Three years	21	32.3
Four years or more	8	12.3
Ethnicity:		
Caucasian	57	87.7
Other	8	12.3
Gender:		
Male	11	16.9
Female	54	83.1
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS:	65	100.0

and community representatives. With regard to their responsibilities in School Councils, each group seems to be a relatively fair representation of its population.

Years on the School Council. Of the total survey participants, 19 (or 29.2%) have been on the School Council for only one year, 17 (or 26.2%) have been on the School Council for two years, 21 (or 32.3%) have been on the School Council for three years, and only 8 (or 12.3%) reported being on the School Council for four years or more.

Ethnic Background. Caucasians represented 57 (or 87.7%) of the survey participants, while other ethnic groups represented only 8 (or 12.3%) of the survey participants. These ethnic groups included 5 (or 7.7%) Latinos, 2 (or 3.1%) African-Americans, and 1 (or 1.5%) Asian.

Gender. Females represented 54 (or 83.1%) of the Council members, while males represented the remaining 11 (or 16.9%). These figures indicate that females outnumbered their male counterparts in the urban school districts involved in this study.

Examining the Research Questions

Each research question is examined in this section through the use of frequency distribution of the responses provided to the individual items of the questionnaire relevant to that particular research question. The

following format is approached in providing an answer to each research question: (a) restatement of the research question; (b) tabulation of the findings based on the number and percentage of the responses to the alternative categories of each item related to the research question; and (c) interpretation of the findings based on the overall perceptions of the survey participants.

Research Question 1: How do Council members perceive the current process of implementing policies and practices of School Councils in urban elementary schools in Massachusetts?

Findings: There were thirteen items of the questionnaire which could provide an answer to this first question. Responses to these items were analyzed in order to determine the overall perception of the survey participants regarding the process of current policies and practices of School Councils in their urban elementary schools.

Item 1: How often, typically, does your School Council meet?

Responses: As presented in Table 2, of the total 65 Council members who participated in this survey, 42 (or 64.6%) indicated that their meetings were arranged on a monthly basis, 13 (or 20.0%) reported having arrangements of twice a month, 7 (or 10.8%) indicated having quarterly arrangements, while the remaining 3 (or 4.6%) respondents

indicated having other means of meeting arrangements which included "Bi-monthly", "Every three weeks", and "More often when necessary".

Table 2
Frequency of the School Council Meetings

MEETINGS	NUMBER	PERCENT
Twice monthly	13	20.0
Monthly	42	64.6
Quarterly	7	10.8
Other arrangements	3	4.6

Item 2: When the School Council does meet, how long does each meeting typically take place?

Responses: As shown in Table 3, of the total 65 Council members who decided to participate in this survey, 52 (or 80.0%) indicated that their meetings typically last between one to two hours, 11 (or 16.9%) reported that their meetings usually last longer than two hours, and the remaining 2 (or 3.1%) respondents indicated that their meetings normally last less than an hour.

Table 3
Length of the School Council Meetings

MEETINGS	NUMBER	PERCENT
Less than an hour	2	3.1
One to two hours	52	80.0
More than two hours	11	16.9

Item 3: How are School Council decisions made?

Responses: According to the data in Table 4, of the total 65 Council members who participated in this survey, 40 (or 61.5%) indicated that their School Council decisions are normally made by consensus, 23 (or 35.4%) reported that the decisions are typically made by majority vote, and the remaining 2 (or 3.1%) respondents indicated that the decisions are usually made by the School Principal.

Table 4
Decision-Making Process by the
School Council

DECISION MAKING	NUMBER	PERCENT
By the Principal	2	3.1
By majority vote	23	35.4
By consensus	40	61.5

Item 4: What role does the Central (District) Office or the Superintendent play on the School Council?

Responses: Based on the data in Table 5, of the total 65 Council members who participated in this survey, 31 (or 47.7%) indicated that the District Office or the Superintendent provides the School Council with resources and information, 12 (or 18.5%) replied that the District Office or the Superintendent does not play any role on the School Council, 8 (or 12.3%) indicated that the District Office or the Superintendent provides the School Council with source of agenda, 5 (or 7.7%) replied that the District Office or the Superintendent directs the School Council, and the remaining 9 (or 13.8%) respondents referred to a variety of other roles. Of the nine cases who referred to

other roles, three indicated that the District Office or the Superintendent posts the meeting dates, two referred to a combination of roles, one indicated that the Superintendent normally adds items to the agenda, one indicated that each Council member is entitled to add items to the agenda, one indicated that the Superintendent dictates the planning process but does not participate in the decision process, and another respondent was not sure about the Superintendent's role in the School Council.

Table 5

District Office or Superintendent's Role
on the School Council

ROLE	NUMBER	PERCENT
None	12	18.5
Resource and information	31	47.7
Source of agenda	8	12.3
Directs the Council	5	7.7
Other roles	9	13.8

Item 5: Who sets the School Council agenda?

Responses: As presented in Table 6, of the total 65 Council members who participated in this survey, 44 (or 67.7%) indicated that the Principal is usually responsible for setting the School Council agenda, 7 (or 10.8%) replied that the Council Chairman assumes such responsibility, 3 (or 4.6%) indicated that an agenda committee is assigned to take such responsibility, 2 (or 3.1%) indicated that the Superintendent normally sets the School Council agenda, and the remaining 9 (or 13.8%) respondents referred to other groups and/or individuals. Five of these respondents indicated that all Council members normally participate in recommending items for the agenda, three indicated that both the School Principal and the Council Chairman arrange items for the agenda, and one indicated that items for the agenda are usually recommended by the Principal and then arranged by the School Council.

Table 6
Responsibility to Set the School Council
Agenda

RESPONSIBLE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Superintendent	2	3.1
Principal	44	67.7
Council Chairman	7	10.8
An agenda committee	3	4.6
Other individuals	9	13.8

Item 6: How is parental membership on the School Council determined?

Responses: As shown in Table 7, of the total 65 Council members who participated in this survey, 48 (or 73.8%) indicated that parental membership on the School Council is elected by peers, 9 (or 13.8%) reported that such membership is appointed by the School Principal, 4 (or 6.2%) indicated that such membership is appointed by someone else, and the other 4 (or 6.2%) respondents referred to other means of membership. Three of these respondents indicated that parental membership on the School Council is obtained through Parent-Teacher Organization meetings

and one indicated that such membership is obtained through a voluntary basis.

Table 7
Parental Membership on the
School Council

PARENTAL MEMBERSHIP	NUMBER	PERCENT
Elected by peers	48	73.8
Appointed by the Principal	9	13.8
Appointed by someone else	4	6.2
Other arrangements	4	6.2

Item 7: How is teacher membership on the School Council determined?

Responses: Based on the data in Table 8, of the total 65 Council members who participated in this survey, 47 (or 72.3%) indicated that teacher membership on the School Council is elected by peers, 15 (or 23.1%) reported that such membership is appointed by the School Principal, 2 (or 3.1%) indicated that such membership is appointed by someone else, and only 1 respondent (or 1.5%) indicated that such membership is obtained through peers and the School Principal.

Table 8
Teacher Membership on the
School Council

TEACHER MEMBERSHIP	NUMBER	PERCENT
Elected by peers	47	72.3
Appointed by the Principal	15	23.1
Appointed by someone else	2	3.1
Other arrangements	1	1.5

Item 8: How is business or community representative membership on the School Council determined?

Responses: According to the data in Table 9, of the total 65 Council members who participated in this survey, 40 (or 61.5%) indicated that business or community representative membership on the School Council is appointed by the Principal, 3 (or 4.6%) reported that such membership is elected by peers, 7 (or 10.8%) indicated that such membership is appointed by someone else, and the remaining 15 (or 23.1%) respondents referred to other means of membership. Five of these respondents indicated that business or community representative membership on the School Council is obtained through community outreach,

four indicated that such membership is obtained through a voluntary representation, three replied that such membership is obtained through team efforts, two indicated that the School Council does not have business or community representatives, and one said such members are recruited by the School Corporate Sponsor.

Table 9
Business or Community Membership on the
School Council

BUSINESS OR COMMUNITY	NUMBER	PERCENT
Elected by peers	3	4.6
Appointed by the Principal	40	61.5
Appointed by someone else	7	10.8
Other arrangements	15	23.1

Item 9: What individual or group wields the most influence on the School Council?

Responses: As presented in Table 10, of the total 65 Council members who participated in this survey, 32 (or 49.2%) believed that the Principal wields the most influence on the School Council, 3 (or 4.6%) indicated that

the Superintendent has the most influence, 2 (or 3.1%) believed that the Council Chairman wields the most influence, 9 (or 13.8%) said that a leadership committee wields the most influence, and the remaining 19 (or 29.2%) respondents referred to other sources of influence. Among these respondents, 16 indicated that decisions are regularly made based on democratic consensus of the group as a whole, two indicated that parents have the most influence, and only one believed that teachers wield the most influence on the School Council.

Table 10

Individuals or Groups With the Most Influence
on the School Council

SOURCES OF INFLUENCE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Superintendent	3	4.6
Principal	32	49.2
Council Chairman	2	3.1
A Leadership Committee	9	13.8
Other	19	29.2

Item 10: To what extent do the parents on the School Council communicate to other parents about Council issues?

Responses: According to the data in Table 11, in response to the question of the extent to which the parents on the School Council communicate the issues to other parents, 24 (or 36.9%) indicated "Systematically", another 24 (or 36.9%) said "Only on important issues", 14 (or 21.5%) indicated "Once in a while", and the remaining 3 (or 4.6%) said "Almost never".

Table 11

Communication Between the Parents on the
School Council and Other Parents About
Council Issues

EXTENT OF COMMUNICATION	NUMBER	PERCENT
Systematically	24	36.9
On important issues	24	36.9
Once in a while	14	21.5
Almost never	3	4.6

Item 11: To what extent do the teachers on the School Council communicate to other teachers about Council issues?

Responses: Based on the data in Table 12, in response to the question of the extent to which the teachers on the School Council communicate the issues to other teachers, 36 (or 55.4%) replied "Systematically", 21 (or 32.3%) said "Only on important issues", 7 (or 10.8%) indicated "Once in a while", and only 1 respondent (or 1.5%) said "Almost never".

Table 12

Communication Between the Teachers on the
School Council and Other Teachers About
Council Issues

EXTENT OF COMMUNICATION	NUMBER	PERCENT
Systematically	36	55.4
On important issues	21	32.3
Once in a while	7	10.8
Almost never	1	1.5

Item 12: How do the teachers and parents communicate with each other on the School Council?

Responses: According to the data in Table 13, in response to this question, of the total 65 Council members who participated in this survey, 45 (or 69.2%) said "As peers", 17 (or 26.2%) indicated "Friendly but separately", 2 (or 3.1%) replied "As adversaries", and only 1 respondent (or 1.5%) said "With hostility".

Table 13

Communication Between Teachers and Parents
on School Council

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	NUMBER	PERCENT
With hostility	1	1.5
As adversaries	2	3.1
Friendly but separately	17	26.2
As peers	45	69.2

Item 13: Have the members of the School Council received training:

- (a) About the school and the students and how they work?
- (b) About the goals and philosophy of School Councils?
- (c) About how members on the School Council are to behave?
- (d) About the Education Reform Act in Massachusetts?

Responses: Table 14 represents the number and percentage of positive responses by the survey participants to each part of this question. Based on the data in this table, 47 (or 72.3%) reported that they have received training about the school and the students, 55 (or 84.6%) indicated that they have received training about the goals and philosophy of School Councils, 39 (or 60.0%) replied that they have received training about behaving on the School Council, and 46 (or 70.8%) said that they have received training about the Education Reform Act in Massachusetts.

Table 14

Types of Training Received by the Members
of the School Council

TYPE OF TRAINING	NUMBER	PERCENT
About the school and students and how they work?	47	72.3
About the goals and philosophy of School Councils?	55	84.6
About how School Council members are to behave?	39	60.0
About the Education Reform Act in Massachusetts?	46	70.8

Research Question 2: How do Council members perceive
the current accomplishment of policies and practices of
School Councils in urban elementary schools in
Massachusetts?

Findings: Responses to the following items will be analyzed in order to determine the overall perception of the survey participants regarding the accomplishment of current policies and practices of School Councils in their urban elementary schools.

Item 1: Philosophically, School Councils in Massachusetts were created as part of educational reform:

- (a) Do you know why they are part of educational reform?
- (b) Have adequate resources been available to your Council?

Responses: As shown in Table 15, of the total 65 survey participants, 52 (or 80.0%) responded as to having knowledge about why School Councils in Massachusetts were created as part of educational reform. Reasons mostly indicated by these respondents follow in the order of frequencies: (a) To promote school-based management and decision making; (b) To increase involvement of teachers, parents, and community in school policies; (c) To provide more opportunities to schools in decisions regarding local issues; (d) To allow more independence to local schools; and (e) To improve the quality of education. However, only 30 (or 46.2%) of the respondents believed that adequate resources have been available to School Councils as partial development needs of educational reform in Massachusetts.

Table 15
Perceptions of Council Members About
the Educational Reform

RESPONSE CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT
Knowledge of the educational reform	52	80.0
Availability of adequate resources	30	46.2

Item 2: With regard to the educational reform philosophy:

- (a) Has your School Council created a mission and/or vision statement?
- (b) Has your School Council developed a School Improvement Plan?
- (c) If a School Improvement Plan has been developed and is currently implemented by your school, how successful has it been in accomplishing its objectives?

Responses: Based on the data in Table 16, of the total survey participants, 62 (or 95.4%) responded that their Council has created a mission and/or vision statement, 64 (or 98.5%) indicated that their Council has developed a School Improvement Plan, and 59 (or 90.8%) responded that the Plan has been successful in accomplishing its objectives. Of this group, 38 (or 58.5%) believed that the School Improvement Plan has accomplished its objectives

with a great deal of success, and 21 (or 32.3%) perceived that the Plan has accomplished a small amount of success.

Table 16
Accomplishing School Councils' Objectives

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Creating a mission and/or vision statement	62	95.4
Developing a School Improvement Plan	64	98.5
Accomplishing the Improvement Plan's Goals	59	90.8

Item 3: In accomplishing the education reform philosophy:

- (a) How much influence has your School Council over the development of the school budget?
- (b) How much influence has your School Council over the allocation of the school budget?
- (c) How much influence has your School Council in determining who should work at the school?

Responses: According to the data in Table 17: (a) 4 (or 6.2%) of the survey participants believed that their School Council has a great deal of influence in the school's budget development, 16 (or 24.6%) perceived an increasing

amount of influence, and 17 (or 26.2%) perceived only a little bit of influence; (b) 2 (or 3.1%) of the respondents believed that their School Council has a great deal of influence in the school's budget allocation, 18 (or 27.7%) perceived an increasing amount of influence, and 25 (or 38.5%) perceived only a little bit of influence; (c) 3 (or 4.6%) of the survey participants believed that their School Council has a great deal of influence over who works at the school, 7 (or 10.8%) perceived an increasing amount of influence, and 13 (or 20.0%) perceived only a little bit of influence.

Table 17

School Council's Influence Over Development/Allocation
of the School Budget and in Determining Who Should
Work at the School

RESPONSE CATEGORY	Development of Budget		Allocation of Budget		Deciding Who Should Work	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
A great deal	4	6.2	2	3.1	3	4.6
An increasing amount	16	24.6	18	27.7	7	10.8
Only a little bit	17	26.2	25	38.5	13	20.0
Not at all	27	41.0	19	30.7	41	64.6

Item 4: In accordance with the educational reform strategy:

- (a) Has your School Council made significant changes in reference to pedagogy?
- (b) Has your School Council made significant changes in reference to curriculum development?
- (c) Has your School Council made significant changes in reference to student achievement?

Responses: The following responses are categorized and presented based on the data in Table 18 as well as the significant changes specified by the participating School Council members in areas of pedagogy, curriculum development, and student achievement:

Table 18

Significant Changes in Pedagogy, Curriculum Development, and Student Achievement

RESPONSE CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT
Significant changes in pedagogy	38	58.5
Significant changes in curriculum	26	40.0
Significant changes in student achievement	33	50.8

(1) Pedagogy: 58.5% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in the area of pedagogy. Most of these respondents specified their perceptions of the changes in which they considered to be accomplishment in this area and are ranked and listed here in the order of the responses frequency: (a) computer technology; (b) integrated social studies; (c) writing skills; (d) reading skills; (e) whole language; (f) integrated math block; (g) math manipulative skills; (h) dimensions of learning; (i) School Improvement Plan; (j) school-based decisions; (k) teacher training and retraining workshops; (l) attempts to implement first-step strategies in creating an accelerated school program; (m) approval of early intervention and other strategies to improve teaching skills; (n) enforcing new anti-violence and discipline policies; and (o) implementing recommendation and implication strategies designed for the School Improvement Plan. Overall, these findings indicate relatively significant changes made by School Councils in areas related to pedagogy.

(2) Curriculum Development: 40.0% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in curriculum development. Some of these respondents specified their observations of the changes in which they considered to be accomplishment in this area and are ranked and listed below in the order of the

responses frequency: (a) School Improvement Plan; (b) new dimensions to current curriculum; (c) system-wide changes in arts, social studies, math, and science curricula; (d) whole language reading; (e) second language program; (f) technology curriculum; (g) assessment of learning outcomes; (h) thematic units open-ended questions; (i) new hands-on math and science lessons; and (j) providing literature-based series on language, science, and social studies. In general, these findings indicate relatively significant changes made by School Councils in areas related to curriculum development.

(3) Student Achievement: 50.8% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in the area of student achievement. Some respondents specified their views of the changes in which they perceived to be accomplishment in this particular area and are ranked and listed here in the order of the responses frequency: (a) School Improvement Plan; (b) basic skills; (c) whole learning skills; (d) writing skills; (e) math preparation program; (f) social studies; (g) new student achievement evaluation strategies; (h) computer technology; (i) computer literacy; and (j) community involvement program. Overall, these findings indicate relatively significant changes made by School Councils in student achievement.

Item 5: Since your School Council became active, have any changes occurred in:

- (a) Student suspensions?
- (b) Disciplinary referrals?
- (c) Student attendance?
- (d) Teacher attendance?
- (e) Extracurricular activities?
- (f) School safety?
- (g) Class size?
- (h) Other areas of school life?

Responses: The following responses are categorized and presented based on the findings reported in Table 19 as well as the significant changes specified by the participating School Council members in areas of student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extracurricular activities, school safety, class size, and other areas of school life:

(1) Student Suspensions: 29.2% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in the area of student suspensions. Some of these respondents specified their views of the changes in which they perceived to be accomplishment in this area and are ranked and listed below in the order of frequencies:

(a) incorporated new strategies in suspensions behavior modification programs; (b) exemplified new guidelines in suspensions policies and procedures; (c) convened new

Table 19

Changes in Student Suspensions, Disciplinary Referrals, Student Attendance, Teacher Attendance, Extracurricular Activities, School Safety, Class Size, and Other Areas of School Life

RESPONSE CATEGORY	SOME CHANGES		NO CHANGES		DON'T KNOW	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
Student suspensions	19	29.2	23	35.4	23	35.4
Disciplinary referrals	16	24.6	24	36.9	25	38.5
Student attendance	22	33.8	22	33.8	21	32.3
Teacher attendance	10	15.4	32	49.2	23	35.4
Extra-curricular activities	24	36.9	27	41.5	14	21.5
School safety	42	64.6	11	16.9	12	18.5
Class size	16	24.6	39	60.0	10	15.4
Other areas of school life	21	32.3	20	30.8	24	36.9

committees on violence and discipline; (d) improved behavior counseling programs; and (e) emphasized on parental awareness programs. These changes are important and must be taken into consideration by other school systems across the nation.

(2) Disciplinary Referrals: 24.6% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in disciplinary referrals. A number of these respondents specified their observations of the changes in which they considered to be accomplishment in this area and are listed here based on the rank order of frequencies: (a) modified discipline policies and procedures; (b) implemented behavior control programs; (c) emphasized on violence and behavior counseling programs; (d) allocated detention room for poor behavior; and (e) corroborated parental awareness programs. These changes are also quite important and should be taken into consideration by other school systems across the nation.

(3) School Attendance: 33.8% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in the area of student attendance. Several participating School Council members specified their perceptions of the changes in which they found them to be accomplishment in this area and are ranked and listed below in the order of frequencies: (a) aggressive behavior work of teachers and new attendance officers; (b) attendance

improvement programs; (c) student of the month programs; (d) new student attendance guidelines; and (e) new absenteeism policies and discipline policies. These changes are important and should be taken into consideration by other school systems throughout the United States.

(4) Teacher Attendance: 15.4% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in the area of teacher attendance. Some respondents specified their observations of the changes in which they perceived to be accomplishment in this area and are ranked here in the order of frequencies: (a) teacher training and retraining workshops; (b) new guidelines in declining absenteeism; (c) new policies in teacher attendance; (d) teacher of the year programs; and (e) enforcing new policies related to wedding, pregnancy, leave of absence, and a death in the family. These changes are also important and should be taken into consideration by other school systems throughout the United States.

(5) Extracurricular Activities: 36.9% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in the area of extracurricular activities. Some of these respondents specified their views of the changes in which they perceived to be accomplishment in this area and are ranked and listed

below in the order of frequencies: (a) focused on safety measures and quality of after-school programs; (b) encouraged the concept and quality of community school activities; (c) emphasized on different fund-raising programs and activities; (d) created a family math program; and (e) encouraged programs on creative arts, crafts, sports, recreation, newsletters, library use, and productive workshops on computer literacy. These changes are quite important and should be taken into consideration by other school systems throughout the United States.

(6) School Safety: 64.6% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in the area of school safety. A number of these respondents specified their observations of the changes in which they considered to be accomplishment in this area and are listed here based on the rank order of frequencies: (a) regulated and enforced new policies on school building safety inspection; (b) improved school security and safety zone in cooperation with the school-oriented police programs; (c) formulated new guidelines for school visitors; (d) emphasized on the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program; and (e) focused on other safety measures such as school traffic control, building technology, tree removal, playground and school yard safety, bathrooms, food, heating, and air conditioning. These changes are also important and should be taken

into consideration by other school systems throughout the United States.

(7) Class Size: 24.6% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council with regard to the class size. Several respondents specified their perceptions of the changes in which they found them to be accomplishment in this area and are ranked and listed below in the order of frequencies:

(a) followed the restriction guidelines for student enrollment; (b) formulated new student/teacher ratio guidelines; (c) formulated new student/space guidelines; (d) reduced class sizes in complying with new policies and procedures on student/teacher ratio as well as student/space ratio; and (e) advised the School Board and School Superintendent in formulating new policies and procedures to reduce class enrollment to an affordable size which could be reasonably tolerable for teachers and students. These changes are important and should be taken into consideration by other school systems throughout the United States.

(8) Other Areas of School Life: 32.3% of the respondents indicated that significant changes have been made by their School Council in other areas of school life. Some respondents specified their observations of the changes in which they perceived to be accomplishment in these areas and are ranked and listed here in the order of

frequencies: (a) participated in greater use of new technology; (b) allocated larger capital input for computers and new technology; (c) increased involvement of teachers and administrators in community outreach; (d) enhanced cultural differences awareness among administrators, teachers, students, and parents; (e) encouraged Parent-Teacher Association activities; (f) enhanced cooperation between teachers and administrators; (g) encouraged administrators, teachers, students, and parents to participate in the School Improvement Program; (h) encouraged more parental involvement in school activities; (i) helped in planning and implementing a new substance abuse prevention program at schools; and (j) supported adoption of a school uniform for students. These changes are important and should be taken into consideration by other school systems throughout the United States.

Research Question 3: How do Council members in urban elementary schools of Massachusetts perceive the effectiveness of their current policies and practices in accomplishing their educational reform mission initiated to improve the quality of education for students?

Findings: According to the data in Table 20, in providing an answer to this question, 15.4% of the participating Council members believed that their current policies and procedures are very effective in accomplishing

their educational reform mission, 29.2% of these respondents indicated being mostly effective, 49.2% responded being somewhat effective, and only 6.2% felt that their current policies and practices are not quite effective. These findings indicate that a majority of the School Council members are enthusiastic about the effectiveness of their current policies and practices in accomplishing their educational reform mission to improve the quality of educational life for children.

Table 20

Perceptions of the Survey Participants Regarding
the Effectiveness of School Councils in
Massachusetts

DEGREE OF EFFECTIVENESS	NUMBER	PERCENT
Very effective	10	15.4
Mostly effective	19	29.2
Somewhat effective	32	49.2
Not very effective	4	6.2

Testing the Research Hypotheses

Inferential analysis of the data was accomplished by testing the null hypotheses derived from the research hypotheses. The first two hypotheses were examined using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation along with its test of significance. The third hypothesis was examined through the use of the t-test for independent means. The final research hypothesis was examined using the Chi-square test of comparison for nonparametric variables. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance securing at least 95% confidence in generalization of the statistical results. The following format was adopted to examine each hypothesis: (a) restatement of the research hypothesis; (b) statement of the hypothesis in the null form; (c) tabulation and presentation of the statistical results; (d) test of the null hypothesis at the selected level of significance; and (e) interpretation of the test results based on rejection or acceptance of the null hypothesis.

Research Hypothesis 1: The more School Councils are involved in allocation and development of school budget, the more they will be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

Null Hypothesis 1: Involvement in allocation and development of the school budget will not significantly influence effectiveness of School Councils in accomplishing

the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

Test Results: The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, along with its test of significance, was employed to examine this first null hypothesis. A summary of the test results is presented in Table 21. Based on the resulting statistical test in this table, the effectiveness of the participating Council members in pursuing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act was found to be significantly correlated with: (a) the extent to which they had influence over allocation of the school budget ($r = +0.38$ and $p = 0.001 < 0.05$); (b) the extent to which they had influence over development of the school budget ($r = +0.41$ and $p = 0.000 < 0.05$); and (c) their overall influence over allocation and development of the school budget ($r = +0.42$ and $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The resulting positive correlations can further be interpreted as the more influence a School Council has over allocation and development of the school budget, the more likely it will be successful in pursuing the projected goals and objectives of the educational reform. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and consequently the research hypothesis was accepted indicating that involvement in allocation and development of the school budget will positively influence effectiveness of School Councils in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of

the Education Reform Act in their respective school districts.

Table 21

Relationship Between the Effectiveness of a School Council in Pursuing the Goals and Objectives of Educational Reform and Its Influence Over the Allocation and Development of the School Budget

AREAS OF INFLUENCE	DESCRIPTIVE		TEST RESULTS	
	MEAN	S.D.	r	p
Allocation of school budget	2.03	0.85	+0.38	0.001*
Development of school budget	1.94	0.97	+0.41	0.000*
Combined influence	1.98	0.84	+0.42	0.000*

Note 1: The mean scores for both variables are based on scale of 1 for "no influence" to 4 for "a great deal of influence".

Note 2: An asterisk denotes a statistically significant relationship between pairs of variables at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

Research Hypothesis 2: The more School Councils are involved in development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan, the more they will be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

Null Hypothesis 2: Involvement in the development and implementation of the proposed School Improvement Plan will not significantly influence the effectiveness of School Councils in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

Test Results: This null hypothesis was also tested using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation along with its test of significance. Table 22 presents a summary of the test results. As shown in this table, the statistical results revealed a significant correlation between the effectiveness of the participating Council members in pursuing the projected goals and objectives of the Educational Reform and the extent to which they had been involved in development and implementation of the proposed School Improvement Plan ($r = +0.34$ and $p = 0.003 < 0.05$). The resulting positive correlation supports the proposition that the more influence a School Council has over development and implementation of the proposed School Improvement Plan, the more likely it will be successful in pursuing the projected goals and objectives of the educational reform. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and

consequently the research hypothesis was accepted indicating that involvement in the development and implementation of the proposed School Improvement Plan will positively influence the effectiveness of School Councils in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

Table 22

Relationship Between the Effectiveness of a School Council in Pursuing the Goals and Objectives of Educational Reform and Its Influence Over the Proposed School Improvement Plan

AREA OF INFLUENCE	DESCRIPTIVE		TEST RESULTS	
	MEAN	S.D.	r	p
School Improvement Plan	4.45	0.81	+0.34	0.003*

Note 1: The mean scores for the SIP variable is based on the scale of 1 for "no influence" to 4 for "a great deal of influence".

Note 2: An asterisk denotes a statistically significant relationship between pairs of variables at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

Research Hypothesis 3: Training of School Council members in conjunction with various goals and objectives of a School Improvement Plan will significantly influence their effectiveness in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

Null Hypothesis 3: Training of School Council members in conjunction with various goals and objectives of a School Improvement Plan will not significantly influence their effectiveness in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

Test Results: The t-test for independent means was applied to examine this null hypothesis. The findings are presented in Table 23. According to the data in this table, the statistical results revealed significant differences between effectiveness of Council members in pursuing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts with regard to their participation in the following training programs: (a) school and student affairs ($t = +2.01$ and $p = 0.049 < 0.05$); and (b) the Education Reform Act ($t = +2.03$ and $p = 0.046 < 0.05$). An interpretation of the calculated positive t values indicates that those who received training in the aforementioned areas were perceived to be more successful in pursuing the projected goals and objectives

Table 23

A Comparison of the Effectiveness of Council Members Who Have Received Training Related to Their Mission and Those Who Have Not

TRAINING AREAS	TRAINED		NOT TRAINED		TEST RESULTS	
	MEAN	S.D.	MEAN	S.D.	t	p
School and Students	2.62	0.80	2.17	0.86	+2.01	0.049*
Goals and Philosophy	2.56	0.81	2.10	0.88	+1.64	0.105
Duty and Authority	2.50	0.82	2.49	0.86	+0.06	0.952
Educational Reform	2.67	0.78	2.23	0.95	+2.03	0.046*

Note 1: The mean scores for the effectiveness variable is based on the scale of 1 for "not very effective" to 5 for "very effective".

Note 2: An asterisk denotes a statistically significant difference between effectiveness of the two groups at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$).

of the Educational Reform as compared with those who did not receive or decided not to participate in such training. The findings, however, indicate no significant differences between (a) the perceived effectiveness of the two groups regardless of whether or not they received training about the goals and philosophy of School Councils ($t = + 1.64$ and $p = 0.105 > 0.05$); and (b) responsibility and authority of the individual members on the Council ($t = +0.06$ and $p = 0.952 > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected for the latter two and accepted for the other two areas of training discussed previously. In other words, these findings indicate that participation of Council members in training programs related to school and student affairs, as well as those related to the Education Reform, were significantly related to their accomplishment in pursuing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

Research Hypothesis 4: School Councils of different urban school districts in Massachusetts are equally successful in incorporating certain policies and procedures to secure more productive changes in their schools' pedagogy, curriculum development, student achievement, student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extracurricular activities, school safety, class size, and other areas of school life.

Null Hypothesis 4: School Councils of different urban school districts in Massachusetts are not equally successful in incorporating certain policies and procedures to secure more productive changes in their schools' pedagogy, curriculum development, student achievement, student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extracurricular activities, school safety, class size, and other areas of school life.

Test Results: This final hypothesis was examined using the Chi^2 test of comparison for nonparametric nominal variables. The resulting statistical test is summarized in Table 24. Based on the data in this table, the participating Council members who represented four different urban towns in Massachusetts were diversified in their perceptions of securing more productive changes in certain school policies and procedures since their School Councils became active. More specifically, by comparing the percentage of positive responses provided to each area of interest, significant differences were found between the four groups in their views of securing productive changes in seven out of the eleven areas of school life as follows:

(a) Curriculum Development ($\text{Chi}^2 = 15.15$ and $p = 0.002 < 0.05$): Of those School Council members who represented School District C, 66.7% perceived significant

Table 24

A Comparison of the Council Members' Success in
Four Different Urban Towns of Massachusetts in
Pursuing Their Mission to Make Changes in
Different Areas of School Life

SCHOOL AFFAIRS	A		B		C		D		TEST RESULTS	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	Chi ²	p
Pedagogy: Yes No	10 10	50.0 50.0	4 4	50.0 50.0	15 6	71.4 28.6	9 7	56.3 43.7	2.36	0.501
Curriculum: Yes No	9 11	45.0 55.0	1 7	12.5 87.5	14 7	66.7 33.3	2 14	12.5 87.5	15.15	0.002*
Student Achievement: Yes No	13 7	65.0 35.0	1 7	12.5 87.5	12 9	57.1 42.9	7 9	43.7 56.3	7.56	0.056
Student Suspensions: Yes No	1 19	5.0 95.0	7 1	87.5 12.5	10 11	47.6 52.4	1 15	6.3 93.7	28.03	0.000*
Disciplinary Referrals: Yes No	1 19	5.0 95.0	3 5	37.5 62.5	11 10	52.4 47.6	1 15	6.3 93.7	17.48	0.001*
Student Attendance: Yes No	2 18	10.0 90.0	7 1	87.5 12.5	10 11	47.6 52.4	2 14	12.5 87.5	29.08	0.000*

Continued, next page

Table 24--Continued

SCHOOL AFFAIRS	A		B		C		D		TEST RESULTS	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	Chi ²	p
Teacher Attendance: Yes No	1 19	5.0 95.0	1 7	12.5 87.5	8 13	38.1 61.9	2 14	12.5 87.5	15.85	0.001*
Extra- Curricular Activities: Yes No	5 15	25.0 75.0	2 6	25.0 75.0	15 6	71.4 28.6	2 14	12.5 87.5	16.94	0.001*
School Safety: Yes No	9 11	45.0 55.0	7 1	87.5 12.5	15 6	71.4 28.6	11 5	68.8 31.2	5.92	0.116
School Size: Yes No	4 16	20.0 80.0	1 7	87.5 12.5	8 13	38.1 61.9	4 12	25.0 75.0	6.63	0.085
Other Areas Of School Life: Yes No	3 17	15.0 85.0	4 4	50.0 50.0	12 9	57.1 42.9	2 14	12.5 87.5	13.05	0.005*

Note: An asterisk denotes a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level (i.e., $p < 0.05$).

improvement in the policies and procedures related to their schools' curriculum development, whereas 45.0% of School District A representatives, 12.5% of School District B, and 12.5% of School District D representatives perceived significant improvement in their schools' policies and procedures related to curriculum development.

(b) Student Suspensions ($\chi^2 = 28.03$ and $p = 0.000 < 0.05$): In School District B, 87.5% of the participating Council members perceived significant improvement in the policies and procedures related to their schools' student suspensions, while 47.6% of the participating Council members in School District C, 6.3% in School District D, and 5.0% in School District A perceived significant changes in student suspension policies.

(c) Disciplinary Referrals ($\chi^2 = 17.48$ and $p = 0.001 < 0.05$): From among the participating Council members in School District C, 52.4% perceived significant improvement in the policies and procedures related to their schools' disciplinary referrals, whereas 37.5% of the School Council representatives in School District B, 6.3% in School District D, and 5.0% in School District A perceived significant improvement in the policies and procedures related to their schools' disciplinary referrals.

(d) Student Attendance ($\chi^2 = 29.08$ and $p = 0.000 < 0.05$): Of those participating Council members

in School District B, 87.5% perceived significant improvement in the policies and procedures related to their schools' student attendance, while 47.6% of those participants in School District C, 12.5% in School District D, and 10.0% in School District A perceived significant improvement in the policies and procedures related to their schools' student suspensions.

(e) Teacher Attendance ($\text{Chi}^2 = 15.85$ and $p = 0.001 < 0.05$): In School District C, 38.1% of the representing Council members perceived significant improvement in the policies and procedures related to their schools' teacher attendance, whereas in School Districts B, D, and A, 12.5%, 12.5%, and 5.0% of their Council members, respectively, perceived significant improvement in teacher attendance.

(f) Extracurricular Activities ($\text{Chi}^2 = 16.94$ and $p = 0.001 < 0.05$): From among the participating Council members in School District C, 71.4% perceived significant improvement in the policies and procedures related to the extracurricular activities in their school, while 25.0% of the respondents in School District A, 25.0% in School District B, and 12.5% in School District D perceived significant changes in the policies and procedures related to their schools' extracurricular activities.

(g) Other Areas of School Life ($\text{Chi}^2 = 13.05$ and $p = 0.005 < 0.05$): Significant and productive changes in

the policies and procedures related to other areas of school life were perceived by 57.1% of the School Council representatives in School District C, 50.0% in School District B, 15.0% in School District A, and 12.5% in School District D.

Overall, the findings of this hypothesis indicate significant differences between School Councils of different urban school districts regarding the degree to which they are able to successfully carry out certain policies and procedures to secure more productive changes in their schools' curriculum development, student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extracurricular activities, and other areas of school life.

Qualitative Analysis of the Data

This part of the chapter is organized into two major sections, including analysis of the responses provided to the open-ended items of the questionnaire as well as those which resulted from the interviews.

Analysis of the Responses to the Open-Ended Items

There were four open-ended questions on the questionnaire designed to allow the respondents to express their opinions about School Councils and to make any additional

comments based on their experience with their own School Council.

Question 1: Based on your experience as a Council member, what factors have facilitated the work of the School Council?

Responses: The factors perceived by the survey participants to have facilitated the work of School Councils are categorized below based on the rank order of the frequency responses:

1. Cooperation, free expression, clear consensus, cordial teamwork, respectful relationship, and purposeful dynamics among Council members as well as parents, teachers, and school administrators (36.8% of the responses). This cluster of important issues was reflected in such comments as:

- (a) "Cooperative efforts of Council members for a common goal as well as cooperation among Council members, parents, teachers, and school administrators."
- (b) "Open discussion and free expression of the Council members lead to a productive consensus decision."
- (c) "Council members are diligently strived to complete all tasks and are showing willingness to help principal."
- (d) "Parents, teachers, and principal work well together to benefit the school and improve education for the children."
- (e) "Through teamwork, Council members are trying to make the school a well-focused learning center with goals and standards for all teachers, students, and parents."

2. Clarity of both the process and issues related to the mission of School Councils in context of the Education Reform Act (28.9% of the responses). This category of the responses derived from such comments as:

- (a) "Discussions of policies and procedures for development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan help ensure the quality of education for children."
- (b) "Council members are enthusiastic about the Education Reform Act and are willing to develop a School Improvement Plan suitable to the needs of our children."
- (c) "Council members are fairly representative of the community and are demonstrating strong desire to understand and pursue the goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act."
- (d) "Council members are well-trained about their responsibilities as related to the accomplishment of goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act."
- (e) "All school issues which are brought to the School Council are basically focus of attention for discussion."

3. Strong and caring leadership by the principal and other school administrators (15.8% of the responses). The issue of strong and caring leadership was reflected in such comments as:

- (a) "A caring principal who is eager to listen to our Council members will help the process and progress in our decision making."
- (b) "Council members have easy access to general information about the school activities."
- (c) "In most situations, school principals are very cooperative in making the Council a success."

- (d) "Willingness of school administrators to share prior experiences, their creativity, and successful management skills."
- (e) "The principal's strong input on a School Improvement Plan has facilitated the work of the School Council."

4. A clear sense of mission and its importance to Council members (10.6% of the responses). This category of the responses concluded from such comments as:

- (a) "Council members have a clear understanding of their mission and responsibilities and are showing interest in awareness about the quality of education for children."
- (b) "The School Council and its members are most anxious to improve the learning environment for the school children."
- (c) "There is a general interest among all Council members to take the work seriously and make our School Council a success."

5. Clear communication among Council members as well as between School Council and school leadership (7.9% of the responses). This important factor was reflected in such comments as:

- (a) "There is an increase in communications between teachers, parents, business partners, and community representatives."
- (b) "Decisions are clearly communicated to the school principal."

Question 2: Based on your experience as a Council member, what factors have been barriers to work of the School Council?

Responses: The following is a classification of the troubling factors perceived by the survey participants as

barriers to the work of School Councils and based on the rank order of the frequency responses:

1. Lack of sufficient cooperation by teachers, school administrators, and school system as a whole (31.3% of the responses). This frequently stated group of barriers was reflected in such comments as:

- (a) "While Council members are eager to work and initiate many good ideas for development of a School Improvement Plan, sometimes their decisions and recommendations are challenged by a group of teachers who are not willing to contribute their time in developing the School Improvement Plan."
- (b) "There is a lack of communication between School Council, teachers, parents, school administrators, school committee, Central Office, and school system as a whole."
- (c) "Most of the times, when circulars from the Central Office call for some information, it is a short notice which requires spending a lot of extra time and creates a great level of deadline pressure."
- (d) "There is little cooperation by school administrators in providing necessary information to the School Council."
- (e) "Some school principals assume all responsibilities and rarely accept input from the School Council."
- (f) "The process of the School Council requires too much paperwork and slowness of response from city officials."

2. Budget constraints and limitation of other resources necessary for developing a comprehensive School Improvement Plan (21.9% of the responses). This important issue was proclaimed in such comments as:

- (a) "There is little budget and limited resources to develop and implement worthwhile programs."
- (b) "Lack of fiscal independence since it is based on a system-wide budget which is tightly controlled by school administrators."
- (c) "Important and ultimate decisions such as budget and hiring are basically made by Central Office."
- (d) "Conflicting expectations of the goals of the School Improvement Plan and limited resources to fulfill such expectations."
- (e) "Many minor issues that come to the team can be resolved immediately and on a daily basis only if necessary resources are available to School Council."

3. Lack of necessary participation of parents and cooperation of community representatives (18.7% of the responses). This group of barriers was concluded from such comments as:

- (a) "Although interested in their children's quality of education, parents do not seem to be willing to participate in many of the activities recommended by our School Council."
- (b) "Difficulty in obtaining consistent community representation."
- (c) "Lack of necessary parental and community involvement."

4. Lack of necessary participation and commitment of School Council members (15.6% of the responses). This important factor was proclaimed in such comments as:

- (a) "Some Council members do not demonstrate much enthusiasm in volunteering their services."
- (b) "Some Council members are not always able or committed to participate in the meetings."

- (c) "Instead of completing meeting items of an agenda, some Council members insist on discussing unrelated tangents."
- (d) "It is very difficult to consent on an agreeable time for all members to meet on a regular and emergency basis."
- (e) "Rumors exist among Council members concerning what has been said or misinterpretation of what had been said."

5. Overwhelming work load and lack of necessary needs assessment and progress evaluation (12.5% of the responses). This important issue was derived from such comments as:

- (a) "Change of membership every year often creates a problem of changing the agenda and repeating some of the issues which had been discussed in previous meetings."
- (b) "School Councils have been tasked with a great deal of work which requires additional meetings to pursue the work load."
- (c) "Although a calendar for the year has been prepared, still additional meetings are sometimes necessary."
- (d) "There seems to be a lack of necessary needs assessment and progress evaluation."

Question 3: Based on your personal and professional experience as a Council member, what is the most rewarding aspect of your participation on the School Council?

Responses: Responses of the survey participants to this question are categorized below based on the rank order of their frequencies:

1. Opportunity to participate in the process of decision making for children's educational development

(31.4% of the responses). This particular feeling was reflected in such comments as:

- (a) "Positive cooperation of all Council members with the School Improvement Planning Committee."
- (b) "Being able to make changes cooperatively and contribute the time to be a part of the change."
- (c) "Feeling of satisfaction that there is a chance to be involved in the decision-making process."
- (d) "Being able to take an active part in decisions and important issues that might affect our schools."
- (e) "Involvement in sharing new ideas and positive school activities to be implemented in the near future."
- (f) "Being able to take an active part in the process of decision making, and working directly with the principal, teachers, parents, and community members."

2. Opportunity to work with a variety of people such as parents, community representatives, teachers, and school administrators (25.7% of the responses). This factor was reflected in such comments as:

- (a) "Positive response from teachers, parents, school principal, and other school administrators."
- (b) "Being able to share ideas regarding whole school programs with a wider range of constituents."
- (c) "Working with staff and school administrators to make our school the best that it can be."
- (d) "Being a part of the changing time where parents can have an input over their children's education."
- (e) "Receiving input from other resources including teachers, administrators, parents, community leaders, and society at large."

- (f) "Greater knowledge of school activities and an increased awareness of current trends as well as community involvement."
- (g) "Being able to see the constituencies are working together in the best interest of all our children and continually focusing on academic achievement."

3. Being actively involved in creating a good school environment and a quality education for children (22.9% of the responses). This important issue was reflected in such comments as:

- (a) "Being actively involved in resolutions for school safety issues."
- (b) "Being made aware of what is going on in the school and setting mood of good school climate."
- (c) "Working together for common cause and helping to improve school for our children."
- (d) "Getting opportunity to set goals for a quality education for our schools and our children's education."
- (e) "A satisfactory feeling for being able to do something important for the schools and the children."

4. Opportunity to understand the system and to make a difference by participating in different school development programs (20.0% of the responses). This particular feeling was reflected in such comments as:

- (a) "Being able to make a difference by development of school improvement programs."
- (b) "Development of a vision and mission statement and participation in the long-term planning."
- (c) "Being able to get a closer insight on the school system and gaining the experience and firsthand knowledge of its operation."

- (d) "Knowing that all the unnecessary paperwork in school is used for something and yet the school is amazingly moving forward."

Question 4: Based on your experience as a Council member, what further comments or observations do you have to share regarding the goals of the Education Reform Act?

Responses: The following is a list of positive and negative comments as well as recommendations made by the survey participants regarding their experiences with School Councils:

1. Positive comments made by survey participants regarding their experiences with School Councils:

- (a) "Self satisfaction for ability to participate on the School Council."
- (b) "Our goals are formed on helping our students to succeed."
- (c) "A satisfactory feeling for being able to do something important for the schools and the children."
- (d) "Greater knowledge of school activities and an increased awareness of current trends as well as community involvement."

2. Negative comments made by survey participants regarding their experiences with School Councils:

- (a) "The school system does not provide enough opportunity for parents' input over the School Improvement Plan."
- (b) "It has been very difficult to get community leaders committed to the School Council and to attending the monthly meetings."
- (c) "School Council work is often frustrated by the lack of sufficient funds to implement the programs proposed by the Council."

- (d) "The schools were operating well before the School Councils were established, and it continues to do well since. It is, therefore, difficult to pinpoint any changes that the School Councils are directly responsible for."

3. Recommendations made by survey participants regarding School Councils:

- (a) "Teamwork among Council members is the key issue for being able to achieve in any School Improvement Plan."
- (b) "School Councils should be provided with more power over the development of school programs."
- (c) "Devotion of time by Council members is a key factor for being a productive part of a School Council."
- (d) "A new policy seems to be necessary for selection of School Council members."

Analysis of the Personal Interviews

This section of the chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of the responses provided by those Council members who decided to participate in an interview on a voluntary basis. As discussed in a previous chapter, in conducting each interview, there were seven initially formulated questions along with a number of follow-up questions during the interview as they relate to the original question and based on the responses provided by the interviewees. The following focal points seem to be appropriate to highlight with both positive and negative views of the interviewees reflected in providing answers to each question:

Question 1: What factors, in your opinion, have facilitated the work of your School Council?

Answers: The interviewees felt that the following factors have facilitated the work of their School Councils:

1. The commitment of all Council members to work together as a team group as well as the cooperative efforts of parents, teachers, and school administrators for a common cause. This factor was initiated on the basis of the three comments quoted below:

(a) "There were really three issues. The first issue was a unity focus. People need to understand that there is no room for a vested interest, that we all have to agree that the mission of the psyche council is to basically provide the governance that will lead toward improvement for the total school. The second issue was the notion of mutual respect; meaning that there cannot be any differentiation between players. The parents, the community members, teachers, and principal need to have an equal voice and that voice needs to be heard. That required some work, by the way, because as you know it is the tendency of school-based people to try and dominate. One of the ways that I have worked around that is that we have a rotating chairpersonship. The third issue that is critically important is the one of communication. What that requires is an agreement that people are going to voice their concerns. That is tied very subtly to the issue of respect and agreement in terms of the equity in representation. But it also requires someone who can facilitate, in a sense, and provide a forum for open discussion. If that means questioning and helping people to understand and express and clarify, then that is again an important component in the success of the School Council."

(b) "Strong desire, enthusiasm, and cordial relationships among Council members to pursue the goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act."

- (c) "Cooperative effort of Council members, parents, teachers, and school staff to improve the quality of education for children."

2. Understanding the policies and procedures for development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan to facilitate the quality of education for children. This important factor was also reflected in such interesting comments as:

- (a) ". . . We have changed principals during the time that we have also been a Council--a change from a principal who was there at the beginning to the change of the principal. The new principal really had a game plan in mind for how she wanted the Council to go. She was aggressive about moving it forward and she also expressed a great desire to the Council to use the School Improvement Plan. There was also a big push for that at a certain point in time. So that really, I would say, was the biggest factor in facilitating a forward motion of the work of the new principal. In addition, I would say that the time that we spent sort of feeling our way along felt sort of useless at the time, but I think it is valuable because we all learned really how to work with each other and what our niche might be in best serving on the Council and so on. That also helps the knowledge and the working relationship between the people on the Council. It makes me wonder what is going to happen to the Council in the future because we have all been together a long time now, and now it starts with new members coming on board."
- (b) "There is keen interest in the improvement of the everyday quality of education and educational materials by parents, teachers, myself, and the school system. We have looked at the curriculum initiatives over the last three years that have been started in Worcester: curriculums in Math, Reading, Social Studies, and Science. There has been an added burden of expense because we have replaced a lot of books and a lot of materials going to hands-on in Math. We have been making sure that parents understood what the role was and what was going on in school. It became, I

think, quite evident that there was participation and their knowledge of the everyday workings of what's going on in school is essential."

- (c) ". . . There is a lot of public talk about the site councils. When you have an active non-profit alliance for education who tries to be a bridge between the community and the schools . . . it is interesting for everybody. The teachers also seem to be willing to work longer days to be part of this and be cooperative and interested."

Question 2: What factors, in your opinion, may have been barriers or are barriers to the work of your School Council?

Answers: The following factors were perceived by the interviewees as barriers to the work of their School Councils:

1. Budget constraints and limitation of other resources necessary for developing a profound and constructive School Improvement Plan for children. This important issue was reflected in such comments as:

- (a) "When it comes to budgetary items, we are pretty much assigned to what we have for money, so in actuality we really don't have a choice. Sometimes there is a frustration that we wish we could overcome. There are a lot of new incentives and inventives, particularly over the last three years, in joining the reform. And most of them are excellent, but the monies to implement them have not always been there. We have had to come up with some creative ways to augment the city-wide budget that has been given to us so that we could do it in a class situation."
- (b) ". . . There is a small budget that we do have discretion over, and we certainly do talk about that a great deal; but I think we just had a different picture. . . . The Council feels that it has very little say in how money is spent in

the schools. As indicated earlier, there is a small budget which is mostly for supplies; and you can move some to here and some to there. But it is not enough, and we could not really take the school in a new direction."

2. Difficulty in obtaining consistent parent participation and community representation. This problem has been implicitly addressed by three of the interviewees whose comments are quoted below:

- (a) "Although interested in their children's quality of education, some parents are not willing to participate in many of the activities recommended by the School Council."
- (b) "Some parents and community members do not show interest in participating in the School Council meetings which might cause reaching the majority vote on the issues discussed."
- (c) "In general, there is a little interest by the majority of parents in compliance with the school affairs."

3. The problem of systemwide control over the school. This problem has been implicitly addressed by two of the interviewees whose comments are phrased below:

- (a) "It was not clear from the start on what our mission was to be or what our responsibilities were going to be, and it was never really made clear to the Council members as to what kind of decision making they would have. Being part of such a big school system was bound to be a barrier for developing a School Improvement Plan. There's so little we have control over, and so much is controlled by the Central Administration."
- (b) "Although Council members are usually eager to work and initiate many good ideas for a School Improvement Plan, sometimes their recommendations are challenged not only by the Central Administration but also by a group of teachers who are not willing to contribute their extra time."

4. The problem of changing the School Council membership every year. This problem has been implicitly addressed by one of the interviewees whose comment is stated below:

"Change of membership every year usually creates a problem of changing the agenda and repeating some of the issues which had been discussed in previous meetings."

Question 3: One fo the tasks mandated by the Education Reform Act was to create a School Improvement Plan. How did your School Council move on accomplishing that task and what was the result?

Answers: Listed below are the observations of the interviewees regarding their School Council's accomplishment in creating a School Improvement Plan in conjunction with the Education Reform Act:

1. Active participation of school administrators, teachers, parents, and community representatives. This accomplishment was addressed on the basis of the following comments made by two of the interviewees:

- (a) "During the process of developing our School Improvement Plan, our Council received a great deal of support from the teachers and school administrators. We are now in the process of in-house assessment of the Plan's effectiveness in its mission of improving the specific needs of individual students at all levels."
- (b) "Continuous involvement of the school principal, teachers, parents, and community leaders helped the School Council to design a profound and comprehensive School Improvement Plan which was later approved by the School Department and the appropriate school committees."

2. Ongoing assessment of the School Improvement Plan effectiveness. This accomplishment was addressed by two of the interviewees whose comments are quoted below:

- (a) "Although development of a School Improvement Plan requires a tedious amount of work, we were able to develop and implement a relatively comprehensive plan suitable to the needs of students. However, while the Plan seems to be effective in reaching its goals and objectives, since it is an ongoing process, it requires more time and more supporting staff to assess its effectiveness through summative and formative evaluations."
- (b) "Since the School Improvement Plan is still in its early stages of experimental development, any judgment about its effectiveness is going to be premature."

Question 4: School Councils were given some control over budgets and charged to allocate funds for the implementation of a School Improvement Plan: (a) How much control does your Council have over the school budget?; (b) How much budget is being allocated to implement a School Improvement Plan?; and (c) What specific items did your Council fund for implementation of the School Improvement Plan?

Answers: The interviewees' responses to the above-mentioned question are three-fold in accordance with the three parts of the question:

1. Control over the school budget. In providing an answer to this part of the question, several interviewees expressed their concerns that the School Council has minimal control (or no control at all) over the school

budget. This point of view is best reflected in the comments made by two of the interviewees which are quoted below:

- (a) "We really don't think the Council has much control over the budget at all. There's a certain dollar figure per student which I think the term comes under supply, and that is the funds that the Council has control over. Out of all the allocated funds has to come all consumable materials that the teachers use every day (i.e., textbook related, paper, pencils, etc.). Once you purchase everything out of the allocated funds, there is not really much money to work with. So that is really a constraint."
- (b) "The site-based Council recognized that and agreed to spend a disproportionate amount of money. We would very much like to see us move towards school-based budgeting; but until we have full control over the budget for the school (and that means personnel and the other issues), we are limited in terms of the decision making that it made around issues of funding."

2. Allocation of budget to implement a School Improvement Plan. In response to this part of the question, some of the interviewees felt that ensuring the necessary resources for a School Improvement Plan is ultimately dependent upon the limited allocation and provision of the budget by the Central Office. This point of view is best reflected in the comments made by two of the interviewees which are stated below:

- (a) "We are not anywhere near approaching the realization of total control for the school. A lot of it still unfortunately comes from, it's handed down from, the Central Office in terms of the allocation of resources, both personnel and budget. What we did last year and what we will do this year is based on the amount of money available to us. We allocated the money in the

following manner; and then we sat down again, looked at our School Improvement Plan, looked at the needs of the school and the needs of the children, and began to allocate the resources."

- (b) "There is one area that we are weak in. It is in the area of allowing the turning over of the decision making for the allocation of resources to the Council because we don't have enough experience at it yet and we still need kind of leadership from the Principal because the Principal has the big picture. What this requires is a process of education for the site-based team in terms of everything that goes into running a school--everything from buying sponges and toilet paper and tampons to textbooks and software and hardware."

3. Specific items funded for the School Improvement Plan. In reaction to this part of the question and in conjunction with the set of priorities projected by their School Councils, some of the interviewees addressed funding the items related to technology, computer hardware and software, teaching materials, library resources, and other educational tools. This point of view is best reflected in the comments made by two of the interviewees which are phrased as follows:

- (a) "We would be getting as much technology into this school as we were able to, and we make every effort for all the teachers to be conversive with the technology. We were able to buy new computers and a fair amount of software as part of our School Improvement Plan."
- (b) ". . . The principal that we have has been successful in getting some new technology into this school. Before that, our computer room had really old computers. Nobody really used them too much. Then we got four computers, and there has been such a change in the teachers that sit on the Council. There were a couple initially that were conversant with the computers and were happy to

use them, and they wanted them in their classrooms. The idea was that they would move around from classroom to classroom. After about a year and a half, all the teachers wanted the computers in their classrooms. We, as a Council, don't have control over the budget to put computers in every classroom. We also think every teacher should have a telephone in their classroom; but we can't really make those changes in the school because we don't have the budget to support the idea."

Question 5: School Councils were charged to increase parental involvement. Besides having parents serving on the School Councils, what other means have you used or plan to use to increase parental involvement in your school?

Answers: To encourage more parental involvement in the school affairs, the interviewees suggested using the following approaches:

1. Encourage parental involvement through different communication strategies and educate them about their important role in enhancing the quality of the school programs. This point of view was reflected in comments made by one of the interviewees as stated below:

"I think it is important to distinguish the role of the parents on the Council. In other words, the site council is only one tiny way where some parents can get involved and that we have an opening. There is an interesting effort to get that widely known among parents and get them interested in nominating the subcommittee members. We also have some specific plans around getting parents to be more involved with homework, some specific things that they want put in the newsletter, etc. The emphasis is getting the parents through different communication strategies to care about the children in school and educate them about the important role that they can play in enhancing the quality of education for their children."

2. Invite parents to the annual or mid-year School Council meetings and seek their advice for making the school a pleasant environment for the safety of their children. This point of view was reflected in the comments made by one of the interviewees and quoted as follows:

"We identified, from the beginning of all of our planning, that the parental involvement as well as the basic skills of Reading and Math would be our priorities. We also included other curriculum areas since then, but those are our foremost at all times. Within the team, we talk about planning the school and the need to have the primary educator--the parents--involved in the child's education, and how do we do this, and how do we explore many ways to do it. It doesn't mean just your mother comes to school or to the PTO for the day. We see involvement as how do we communicate and work together. We also involved the parents through the so-called WEB Program (Wonderful Exciting Books), which is designed so that every night the child takes a book home and he can read to someone, the child can be read to, or the child can read himself, and then the parents just put their initials. Now we consider that parental involvement, and we have really grown over the past couple of years as to what we consider parental involvement--anything that has children and parents and the school working together. We have really grown in that area. We also invited parents to the annual or mid-year School Council Meetings and sought their advice for making the school a pleasant environment for the safety of their children."

3. Conduct training sessions for parents and send them literature pertinent to the Education Reform Act and educate them about your accomplishment in the School Improvement Plan. This recommendation was made by one of the interviewees as stated below:

"Obviously, this again stems from my personal interest in making the school reflective as the needs of kids and parents. Our commitment to the Education Reform Act is to concentrate on many factors, one of them being the need for parent involvement. While we occasionally involve parents in our fund-raising activities, we also want them to share in the governance of the school. And in order to do that, parents have to feel that they are a part of the school and that requires a tremendous degree of involvement. As a resolution for pursuing such a goal, last year we arranged a number of different training sessions for parents. As a follow-up to the training sessions, we also sent them some literature regarding our progress in the School Improvement Plan."

Question 6: School Councils were also asked to create a welcoming environment at their schools, in order to originate a positive climate characterized by tolerance and acceptance: (a) Have you investigated the climate at your school?; and (b) Have you made any changes or plans that would enhance the welcoming environment?

Answers: The interviewees' responses to the above-mentioned question were twofold in accordance with the two parts of the question:

1. Investigation on the school climate. In providing an answer to this part of the question, some interviewees indicated that their Councils had investigated the climate at their schools by conducting research studies using survey instruments which were developed to seek the attitudes of teachers, students, parents, principals, and other administrators toward their schools' environment and to ask their opinions regarding necessary changes in their

schools' climate. An interesting comment from one of the interviewees is quoted as follows:

"On the positive side, when the Council first got started, it conducted a survey and included the parents, the faculty, the students, and their feelings about the school. It was a good survey. It listed some real tangible information and it turns out that people really felt good about the school. They felt safe, they felt proud, etc. They were specific about what they hated (i.e., the condition of the bathrooms, etc.). In areas of getting along with each other, we had all things to be proud of. On the other hand, parents don't feel good about this school's climate, because of the responses such as the school is dingy, it is old, the only way to get anywhere is to go up and down some stairs, etc. It is really not a welcoming environment. This looks like a dumping ground. We are also concerned about safety, because recently there was an incident in this school."

2. Changes or plans for enhancing the school climate to a welcoming environment. In response to this part of the question, the interviewees demonstrated different attitudes toward their school environment. Some showed positive attitudes, some showed negative attitudes, and some others were neutral about various aspects of their school climate. An interesting comment from one of the interviewees is phrased below:

"We are continuously look at that; and it so happens that by becoming an accelerated school, we were included in a survey school environment in which both children and teachers were able to participate. We are now working on a survey to send to parents. The survey will include a total picture of our school and the climate and all of the aspects of it. This type of survey serves as an assessment of the school environment and is going to be very effective because then we have data so that we can identify the problems and try

to find solutions to each. We are always trying to work on improving and also to include all of our diverse communities to continue to learn and work together and make sure that we touch all of those bases."

Question 7: What further comments or observations would you have to share regarding the School Councils based on your understanding of the goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act?

Answers: The following are additional comments and observations shared by the interviewees regarding the goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act:

- (a) "The school system does not provide enough opportunity for parents' input over the School Improvement Plan."
- (b) "It has been very difficult to get community leaders committed to the School Council and attending the monthly meetings."
- (c) "School Councils' work is often frustrated by the lack of sufficient funds and support personnel for implementation of programs proposed by the Council members."
- (d) "School Councils should be given the opportunity to have more power over school programs."

Summary

This chapter presented an analysis and interpretation of the data based on certain quantitative and qualitative methods relevant to the scope of this study. The quantitative analysis of the data was achieved through the use of appropriate statistical procedures to present a profile of

the survey participants, to provide answers to the research questions, and to test the research hypotheses at the selected level of significance. The qualitative analysis of the data was accomplished by interpretation of the responses by the survey participants to the open-ended items of the questionnaire as well as the resulting interviews.

Although a detail of each finding was presented in different sections of the chapter, in this summary, a number of significant findings specifically deserve further concentration. Overall, the findings of this study revealed significant and positive changes in urban schools of Massachusetts as a result of the School Council's mission in mandating the Education Reform Act. However, the School Councils of different urban school districts in Massachusetts were not equally successful in incorporating certain policies and procedures to secure more productive changes in their schools' curriculum, student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extracurricular activities, and other areas of school life. It was also found that training of School Council members in conjunction with the function of school, students, and educational reform will significantly influence their effectiveness in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts. The findings also indicated that the more School Councils were involved in the allocation and

development of the school budget, the more they were perceived to be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts. The findings further indicated that the more School Councils were involved in the development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan, the more they were perceived to be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

Finally, several factors were found as barriers to the work of School Councils which include: (a) Lack of sufficient cooperation by teachers, school administrators, and school system as a whole; (b) Budget constraints and limitation of other resources necessary for developing a comprehensive School Improvement Plan; (c) Lack of necessary participation of parents and cooperation of community representatives; (d) Lack of necessary participation and commitment of School Council members; and (e) Overwhelming work load and lack of necessary needs assessment and progress evaluation.

A summary of the study, general conclusions and implications, recommendations to school systems, as well as suggestions for future research are presented in the following chapter.

C H A P T E R V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study, general conclusions and implications based on the significant findings, and recommendations to all decision makers, School Councils, as well as any other groups or individuals who are currently playing a schoolwide or a systemwide role in conjunction with such mandates as set forth in the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. The chapter concludes with suggestions and recommendations to those future investigators who might be interested in conducting additional studies pertinent to this topic.

Summary of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of, and roles played by, School Councils in complying with the mandates set forth in the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. The study also investigated the effectiveness of the current policies and practices of School Councils in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts. The study further evaluated the perceptions of the School Council members regarding the extent to which they are successful in accomplishing the

projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act as a result of involvement in the development and allocation of a profound school budget aimed to fulfill the accomplishment of a comprehensive School Improvement Plan.

A review of the literature pertinent to the topic was conducted in order to introduce the available references in supporting the need for and significance of this study. This literature review also helped the researcher in developing the research design, the research questions, hypotheses, selection of the subjects, development of the survey instrument, preparation of personal interviews, and collection and analysis of the data for the study.

The data collected for the study were transferred into a mainframe computer system and then treated through the programming provisions of the latest version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie & Associates, 1996). The quantitative analysis of the data was achieved utilizing certain descriptive and inferential statistics pertinent to the scope of this study. The descriptive analysis of the data was accomplished using frequency distribution of the responses to the individual items of each questionnaire in an attempt to: (a) provide a profile of the School Council members who participated in this study; and (b) examine the stated research questions. The inferential analysis of the data was achieved by testing the research hypotheses at the selected 0.05 level of

significance and through the use of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, the t-test for independent means, and the Chi² method of comparison for nonparametric variables. The qualitative analysis of the data was performed by analyzing the responses provided to the open-ended items of the questionnaire by the survey participants as well as those resulted from the interviews. The following is a summary of the significant findings derived from the data collected for this study:

1. As indicated by a majority of the survey participants, most of the School Councils, typically, meet either once or twice a month with a period of approximately one to two hours for each meeting. Assuming that all meetings take place on a regular basis, for each school year, the average number of meetings will range approximately between 10 and 20. Under the same assumption, the average number of meeting hours, for each school year, will range approximately between 10 to 40 hours. Thus, a fair estimation of the average number of meetings throughout the school year will be 15 times and, thus, the average number of meeting hours per school year will be 25 hours.

2. A vast majority of the participating Council members indicated that in their meetings, the decisions are normally made through a common consensus or by a convincing majority vote.

3. In response to the question of "What role does the Central Office play on the School Council?", from among the survey participants, 18.5% replied that the Central Office does not play any role on the School Council, 47.7% indicated that the District Office provides them with information and resources, 12.3% replied that the District Office provides them with sources of agenda, 7.7% replied that the District Office eventually directs the School Council, and the remaining 13.8% referred to several other roles of the Central Office including arrangement of the meeting dates, setting up the meeting process, and inclusion of new items to the previously planned agenda.

4. When the survey participants were asked "Who sets the School Council agenda?", 67.7% responded that the School Principal is usually responsible for setting the School Council agenda, 10.8% replied that the Council Chairman assumes such responsibility, 4.6% indicated that an agenda committee is assigned to take such a role, 3.1% replied that the Superintendent typically sets the School Council agenda, and the remaining 13.8% referred to other groups including the Council members themselves, the School Principal and Council Chairman, and the School Principal and School Council jointly.

5. In providing an answer to the question of "How is parental membership on the School Council determined?", of the participating Council members, 73.8% replied that

parental membership on the School Council is elected by peers, 13.8% reported that such membership is appointed by the School Principal, 6.2% indicated that such membership is appointed by someone else, and the other 6.2% referred to other means of membership which included those obtained through Parent-Teacher Organization meetings and those obtained through a voluntary basis.

6. In response to the question of "How is business or community representative membership on the School Council determined?", from among the survey participants, 61.5% indicated that business or community representative membership on the School Council is appointed by the School Principal, 4.6% replied that such membership is elected by peers, 10.8% indicated that such membership is appointed by someone else, and the remaining 23.1% referred to other means of membership which included recruitment by community outreach, through team efforts, on the basis of a voluntary representation, and through the School Corporate Sponsor.

7. When the survey participants were asked "What individual or group wields the most influence on the School Council?", 4.6% referred to the School Superintendent as the most influential source, 3.1% believed that the Council Chairman wields the most influence, 13.8% referred to a leadership committee as the most influential source, and the remaining 23.1% referred to other sources of influence,

whereas some believed that teachers wield the most influence on the School Council, some indicated that parents have the most influence, and others observed that decisions are regularly made by the Council members based on a majority vote consensus.

8. In providing an answer to the question of "To what extent do the parents on the School Council communicate to other parents about Council issues?", 36.9% of the survey participants indicated "systematically", another 36.9% replied "only on important issues", 21.5% indicated "once in a while", and the remaining 4.6% of the survey participants replied "almost never".

9. In response to the question of "To what extent do the teachers on the School Council communicate to other teachers about Council issues?", of the survey participants, 55.4% replied "systematically", 32.3% said "only on important issues", 10.8% indicated "once in a while", and only 1.5% indicated "almost never".

10. When the survey participants were asked "How do the teachers and parents communicate with each other on the School Council?", 69.2% said "as peers", 26.2% indicated "friendly but separately", 3.1% replied "as adversaries", and only 1.5% of the survey participants said "with hostility".

11. In providing an answer to the question of "What types of training have been received by members of the

School Council?", from among the participating Council members, 72.3% responded "About the school and the students and how they work", 84.5% replied "About the goals and philosophy of School Councils", 60.0% indicated "About how members on the School Council are to behave", and 70.8% said "About the Education Reform Act in Massachusetts".

12. The most frequent reasons stated by the survey participants regarding the philosophy of creating the School Councils as part of educational reform in Massachusetts included: (a) To promote school-based management and decision making; (b) To increase involvement of teachers, parents, and community in school policies; (c) To provide more opportunities to schools in decisions regarding local issues; (d) To allow more independence to local schools; and (e) To enhance the quality of education. However, only 46.2% of the respondents believed that adequate resources have been available to School Councils as partial development needs of the Education Reform.

13. In accordance with the goals and objectives of the Education Reform in Massachusetts, a vast majority of the survey participants indicated that: (a) their School Councils have articulated a mission and/or vision statement; (b) their School Councils have developed a School Improvement Plan; and (c) the Plan has been successful in accomplishing its objectives.

14. Only 30.8% of the survey participants indicated that their School Councils have an increasing or a great deal of influence over the development and allocation of the school budget. It was also found that only 15.4% of the survey participants perceived that their School Councils have an increasing or a great deal of influence over the school in determining who should work at the school.

15. Of the participating Council members, 58.5% believed that they have been successful in accomplishing significant changes in the following areas related to pedagogy: focus on computer technology, integrated social studies, writing skills, reading skills, whole language, math block, math manipulative skills, dimensions of learning, School Improvement Plan, school-based decisions, teacher training and retraining workshops, implemented first-step strategies in creating an accelerated school program, approved early intervention and other strategies to improve teaching skills, empowered new anti-violence and discipline policies, and implemented recommendation and implication strategies designed for the School Improvement Plan.

16. From among the participating Council members, 40.0% believed that they have been successful in accomplishing significant changes in the following areas related to curriculum: School Improvement Plan; supported new dimensions to current curriculum; encouraged systemwide

changes in arts, social studies, mathematics, science curricula; whole language reading; second language program; technology curriculum; emphasized assessment of learning outcomes; thematic units open-ended questions; new hands-on math and science lessons; and encouraged using literature-based series on language, science, and social studies.

17. Of the participating School Council members, 50.8% indicated that they have been successful in accomplishing significant changes in the following areas related to student achievement: School Improvement Plan, improving basic skills, whole learning skills, writing skills, math preparation program, social studies, new student achievement evaluation strategies, computer technology, computer literacy, and community involvement programs.

18. From among the School Council members who participated in the study, 29.2% indicated that they have been successful in accomplishing significant changes in the following areas related to student suspensions: incorporated new strategies in suspensions behavior modification programs, exemplified new guidelines in suspensions policies and procedures, convened new committees on violence and discipline, improved behavior counseling programs, and emphasized parental awareness programs.

19. Of the participating Council members, 24.6% indicated that they have been successful in accomplishing

significant changes in the following areas related to disciplinary referrals: modified discipline policies and procedures, helped implement behavior control programs, emphasized violence and behavior counseling programs, allocated detention room for poor behavior children, and corroborated parental awareness programs.

20. From among the participating Council members, 33.8% indicated that they have been successful in accomplishing significant changes in the following areas related to student attendance: focused on behavior work of teachers and new attendance officers, helped with planning attendance improvement programs, designed student of the month programs, helped with planning new student attendance guidelines, and modified absenteeism and discipline policies.

21. Of the participating Council members, 15.4% indicated that they have been successful in accomplishing significant changes in the following areas related to teacher attendance: recommended new policies on teacher training and retraining workshops, new guidelines in declining absenteeism, new policies in teacher attendance, upgrading teacher of the year programs, and modifying policies related to wedding, pregnancy, leave of absence, and a death in the family.

22. From among the participating Council members, 36.9% indicated that they have been successful in

accomplishing significant changes in the following areas related to extracurricular activities: focused on safety measures and quality of after-school programs; encouraged the concept and quality of community school activities; emphasized different fund-raising programs and activities; helped create a family math program; and encouraged programs on creative arts, crafts, sports, recreation, newsletters, library use, and productive workshops on computer literacy.

23. Of the participating Council members, 64.6% indicated that they have been successful in accomplishing significant changes in the following areas related to school safety: regulated and enforced new policies on school building safety inspection; improved school security and safety zone in cooperation with the school-oriented police programs; formulated new guidelines for school visitors; emphasized the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program; and focused on other safety measures such as school traffic control, new building technology, tree removal, playground and schoolyard safety, bathrooms, food, heating and air conditioning.

24. From among the participating Council members, 24.6% indicated that they have been successful in accomplishing significant changes in the following areas related to the issue of class size: followed the restriction guidelines for student enrollment, formulated new

student/space guidelines, reduced class sizes in complying with new policies and procedures on student/teacher ratio as well as student/space ratio, and advised the School Board and School Superintendent in formulating new policies and procedures to reduce class enrollment to an affordable size which could be reasonably tolerable for both teachers and students.

25. Of the participating Council members, 32.3% indicated that they have been successful in accomplishing significant changes in other areas of school life as follows: participated in greater use of new technology; allocated larger capital input for computers and new technology; increased involvement of teachers and administrators in community outreach; enhanced cultural differences awareness among administrators, teachers, students, and parents; encouraged Parent-Teacher Association activities; enhanced collegiality of teachers and administrators; encouraged administrators, teachers, students, and parents to participate in the School Improvement Program; encouraged more parental involvement in school activities; helped in planning and implementing a new substance abuse prevention program at schools; and supported adoption of a new school uniform for students.

26. A majority of the School Council members were found to be enthusiastic about the effectiveness of the current policies and practices of their School Councils in

accomplishing their educational reform mission to improve the quality of educational life for children.

27. In testing the first hypothesis, it was found that the more School Councils were involved in the allocation and development of the school budget, the more they were perceived to be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

28. The statistical results in testing the second hypothesis indicated that the more School Councils were involved in the development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan, the more they were perceived to be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

29. In examining the third hypothesis, it was found that the training of School Council members, in conjunction with the function of school, students, and educational reform, will significantly influence their effectiveness in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

30. The statistical results in testing the final hypothesis indicated that School Councils of different urban school districts in Massachusetts were not equally successful in incorporating certain policies and procedures to secure more significant productive changes in their

schools' curriculum, student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extra-curricular activities, and other areas of school life.

31. The top five important factors perceived by the survey participants to have facilitated the work of School Councils are listed here based on the rank order of their frequencies: (a) information about School Board decision-making process; (b) awareness of current educational trends and issues; (c) cooperative efforts of Council members for a common cause; (d) flexibility to meet at the convenience of the Council members; and (e) understanding the need for development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan.

32. The top five troubling factors perceived by the survey participants as barriers to work of School Councils are listed here based on the rank order of their frequencies: (a) budget constraints for a comprehensive School Improvement Plan; (b) lack of necessary assistance from the school system; (c) more pre-training sessions would have been beneficial; (d) lack of sufficient cooperation by school administrators; and (e) limited resources to help develop and implement worthwhile programs for students.

33. As perceived by the Council members, the top five most rewarding aspects of participation on the School Council are listed here based on the rank order of their frequencies: (a) group decision making; (b) awareness of

the school affairs; (c) development of a vision and mission statement; (d) development of a School Improvement Plan; and (e) being a team member working for the sake of all students.

34. The top five important comments made by the participating School Council members regarding their experiences with School Councils are listed here based on the rank order of their frequencies: (a) devotion of time is a key factor for accomplishing the goals and objectives of a School Council; (b) teamwork is the key issue when you are part of a School Council; (c) self satisfaction for being able to participate on the School Council; (d) School Councils should have more power over school programs; and (e) School Councils' goals are formed on helping students to succeed in their academic life.

Generally speaking, the findings of this study revealed significant and positive changes in urban schools of Massachusetts as a result of the School Council's mission in achieving the goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act. However, the School Councils of different urban school districts in Massachusetts were not equally successful in incorporating certain policies and procedures to secure more productive changes in their schools' curriculum, student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extracurricular activities, and other areas of school life. It was also found that the

training of School Council members, in conjunction with the function of school, students, and educational reform, will significantly influence their effectiveness in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts. The findings also indicated that the more School Councils were involved in the allocation and development of the school budget, the more they perceived themselves as successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts. The findings further indicated that the more School Councils were involved in the development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan, the more they perceived themselves as successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts.

General Conclusions and Implications

The following conclusions and implications were drawn from a variety of the significant findings originated from the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data involved in this study:

1. The findings of this study revealed a significant and positive relationship between School Councils' level of involvement in the allocation and development of the school budget, and the extent to which they were perceived to be

successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts. It was, therefore, concluded that the more School Councils get involved in the allocation and development of the school budget, the more they would be successful in accomplishing the goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in Massachusetts.

2. Based on the statistical results, a significant and positive relationship was found between School Councils' level of involvement in the development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan and the extent to which they were perceived to be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts. It was, therefore, concluded that the more School Councils get involved in the development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan, the more they would be successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act.

3. According to the statistical test, those Council members, who had been trained in conjunction with various goals and objectives of a School Improvement Plan, were perceived to be more successful in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act in their school districts. It was, therefore, concluded that the training of Council members in compliance with the goals and objectives of a School Improvement Plan will

significantly influence their effectiveness in pursuing the projected goals and objectives of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act.

4. The findings of this study indicated that School Councils of different urban schools in Massachusetts perceived various degrees of accomplishment in incorporating certain policies and procedures to secure more productive changes in their schools' curriculum, student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extracurricular activities, and other areas of school life. It was, therefore, concluded that School Councils of different urban elementary schools are not equally successful in incorporating specific policies and procedures to assure more significant and productive changes in certain areas of school life.

5. In compliance with the goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act, and as perceived by the participating Council members, it can be concluded that the most contributing factors in pursuing the policies and practices relevant to the goals of School Councils are knowledge of the School Board decision-making process, awareness of the current educational trends and issues, cooperative efforts of Council members for a common cause, flexibility to meet at the convenience of the Council members, and understanding the need for development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan.

6. In conjunction with the goals and objectives of the Education Reform, and as perceived by the participating Council members, it can be concluded that the most troubling factors in pursuing the policies and practices set forth by the School Councils are budget constraints for a comprehensive School Improvement Plan, lack of necessary assistance from the school system, lack of necessary training and workshops, lack of sufficient cooperation by school administrators, and limited resources to develop and implement worthwhile programs.

7. Based on the perceptions of the Council members, it can be concluded that the most rewarding aspect of participation in the School Council are group decision-making, awareness of the school affairs, development of vision and mission statements, development of a School Improvement Plan, and working as a team to ensure a better quality of education and a pleasant school environment for all students.

8. In reference to many comments made by the survey participants regarding their experiences with School Councils, it can be concluded that devotion of time by the School Council members is the key factor for being part of a School Council; teamwork is the key issue for members of a School Council; self satisfaction is important for being able to participate in a School Council; School Councils should have more power over many school programs;

and the goals and objectives of School Councils are formed on helping students to succeed in their academic life.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the most important findings of this study as derived from the research hypotheses and the statistical hypotheses as well as those resulted from the interviews and the responses provided to the open-ended items of the questionnaire:

1. It is recommended that school systems in Massachusetts make all possible efforts to get School Councils more reasonably involved in the process of development and allocation of the school budgets in order to be more successful in pursuing and accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of the mandated Education Reform Act in their school districts.

2. School systems in Massachusetts should encourage more participation of School Councils in the process of the development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan in compliance with the projects goals and objectives of the mandated Education Reform Act in order to ensure a better quality of education and a pleasant school environment for all students in their school districts.

3. It is recommended that school districts in Massachusetts facilitate necessary training sessions and

workshops for their School Councils aimed to enhance their knowledge of the Education Reform Act and make them more effective in developing and implementing a School Improvement Plan suitable to the needs of students.

4. School districts in Massachusetts should evaluate and compare accomplishments of different School Councils in pursuing their School Improvement Plans and help them incorporate policies and procedures to secure more significant and productive changes in their schools' curriculum, student suspensions, disciplinary referrals, student attendance, teacher attendance, extracurricular activities, and other areas of school life.

5. It is recommended that school districts in Massachusetts provide each of their School Councils with a sufficient budget allocation and supporting personnel, as well as other necessary resources, to help them develop and implement productive programs which are suitable to the academic lives of students.

6. In order to secure a better quality of education for all students, all School Councils in Massachusetts are encouraged to review and revise their vision and mission statements and to make all efforts necessary to enhance their awareness of the school affairs, their knowledge of current educational trends and issues, their cooperative decision-making process, their relations with teachers and school administrators, as well as their

cooperative teamwork attempts for parental and community involvement.

7. In compliance with the mandates of the Education Reform Act, school districts in Massachusetts should take all precautionary actions necessary to properly enforce membership requirements of each School Council with a broad representation of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community.

8. It is recommended that school districts in Massachusetts conduct an annual convention for all district-wide School Councils to share their accomplishments in their School Development Plans and to seek solutions for the obstacles which prevent them from pursuing the mandated goals and objectives of the Education Reform Act.

Suggestions for Future Research

As is the case with the majority of the studies reviewed, this study has its own scope and limitations with regard to the sample selection, the survey instrument, the data collection procedure, as well as the research design. The following recommendations may, therefore, be worthwhile for future investigators who might be interested in conducting other possible studies related to this particular topic:

1. This study was limited to a sample of elementary School Council members selected from four urban towns in Massachusetts. Interested future investigators are, therefore, encouraged to conduct a statewide replication of the study at both elementary and high school levels and in other states where similar initiatives have been taken, in order to ascertain the reliability and generalization of the findings.

2. While relatively comprehensive in nature, the survey instrument developed for this study did not classify some of the items in the Likert-type scales. Further investigation is, therefore, necessary to change some nominal types of the questionnaire items to the measurable scales for a more accurate interpretation of the responses.

3. Although there was an item in the questionnaire seeking the factors that have been barriers to the work of School Councils, this study did not emphasize the source and the impact of these barriers in the development and implementation of a School Improvement Plan. Future research is, therefore, recommended to further identify barriers to the work of School Councils and the extent to which each barrier might have an impact on their job accomplishment.

4. The data collected for this study were limited to the perceptions of the Council members regarding the

process and accomplishment of their School Councils in different aspects of a School Improvement Plan. A similar study is, therefore, recommended to investigate the perceptions of school teachers and school administrators regarding the effectiveness of their School Councils in compliance with the projected goals and objectives of the mandated Massachusetts Education Reform Act.

5. This study was designed based on the perceptions of Council members regarding their own performance and effectiveness in developing a School Improvement Plan. A follow-up study seems to be appropriate to evaluate the performance and effectiveness of these Council members in accomplishing the projected goals and objectives of their School Improvement Plans.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

SCHOOL COUNCIL MEMBER SURVEY

Dear Council Member:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of School Councils. All responses will be anonymous. Your responses are critical. Please answer each question. The survey is divided into four parts and should take no more than twenty minutes. After you have completed the survey, please return it in the attached, postage-paid envelope within the next week.

PART I: ABOUT YOU

1. Gender:

_____ Male
_____ Female

2. Your role on the Council:

_____ Teacher
_____ Parent
_____ Administrator
_____ Business/Community

3. How many years, counting this year, have you been on the School Council? _____

4. Ethnicity:

_____ African-American
_____ Caucasian
_____ Latino
_____ Asian
_____ Other (Specify: _____)

PART II: THE SCHOOL COUNCIL PROCESS

5. How often, typically, does your Council meet?

- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Twice monthly
- ☐ Monthly
- ☐ Quarterly
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

6. When the School Council does meet, how long, typically, are the meetings?

- ☐ Less than an hour
- ☐ One to two hours
- ☐ Two to three hours
- ☐ Longer

7. How are School Council decisions made?

- ☐ By the Principal
- ☐ By majority vote
- ☐ By consensus
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

8. What role does the Central (District) Office or the Superintendent play on the School Council?

- ☐ None
- ☐ Source of agendas
- ☐ Resource and information
- ☐ Directs the Council
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

9. Who sets the School Council agenda?

- ☐ Superintendent
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Council Chairman
- ☐ An agenda committee
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

10. How is parental membership on the School Council determined?

- ☐ Elected by peers
- ☐ Appointed by Principal
- ☐ Appointed by someone else
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

11. How is teacher membership on the School Council determined?

- ☐ Elected by peers
- ☐ Appointed by Principal
- ☐ Appointed by someone else
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

12. How is business or community representative membership on the School Council determined?

- ☐ Elected by peers
- ☐ Appointed by Principal
- ☐ Appointed by someone else
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

13. What individual or group wields the most influence on the School Council?

- ☐ Superintendent
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Council Chairman
- ☐ A leadership committee
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

14. To what extent do the parents on the Council communicate to other parents about Council issues?

- ☐ Systematically
- ☐ On important issues
- ☐ Once in a while
- ☐ Almost never
- ☐ Comments: _____)

15. To what extent do the teachers on the Council communicate to other teachers about Council issues?

☐ Systematically
☐ On important issues
☐ Once in a while
☐ Almost never
☐ Comments: _____

16. How do the teachers and parents communicate with each other on the School Council?

☐ With hostility
☐ As adversaries
☐ Friendly but separately
☐ As peers
☐ Comments: _____

Have the members of the School Council received training:

17. About the school and the students and how they work?

☐ Yes
☐ No

18. About the goals and philosophy of School Councils?

☐ Yes
☐ No

19. About how members on the Council are to behave?

☐ Yes
☐ No

20. About the Education Reform Act in Massachusetts?

☐ Yes
☐ No

PART III: THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

21. School Councils were created as part of educational reform in Massachusetts. Do you know why School Councils are part of educational reform?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If "Yes", specify: _____

22. Has your Council created a mission and/or vision statement?

☐ Yes
☐ No

23. Has your Council developed a School Improvement Plan (SIP)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

24. Has your Council made significant changes in pedagogy?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If "Yes", specify: _____

25. Has your Council made significant changes in curriculum?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If "Yes", specify: _____

26. Has your Council made significant changes in student achievement?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If "Yes", specify: _____

27. How much influence has the School Council over the development of the school budget?
- ☐ A great deal
☐ An increasing amount
☐ Only a little bit
☐ None at all
28. How much influence has the School Council over the allocation of the school budget?
- ☐ A great deal
☐ An increasing amount
☐ Only a little bit
☐ None at all
29. Does the Council have any influence over who works at the school?
- ☐ A great deal
☐ An increasing amount
☐ Only a little bit
☐ None at all
30. If a School Improvement Plan was implemented, how successful was it in accomplishing its objectives?
- ☐ A great deal
☐ An increasing amount
☐ Only a little bit
☐ None at all
31. Have adequate resources been available to the School Council?
- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Since the School Council became active, have any changes occurred in:

32. Student suspensions?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If "Yes", cite some evidence: _____

33. Disciplinary referrals?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If "Yes", cite some evidence: _____

34. Student attendance?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If "Yes", cite some evidence: _____

35. Teacher attendance?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If "Yes", cite some evidence: _____

36. Extracurricular activities?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If "Yes", cite some evidence: _____

37. School safety?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If "Yes", cite some evidence: _____

38. Class size?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If "Yes", cite some evidence: _____

39. Any other areas of school life?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If "Yes", cite some evidence: _____

Please specify the area(s) to which you refer:

40. In general, how would you rate the effectiveness of your School Council?

_____ Very effective
_____ Mostly effective
_____ Somewhat effective
_____ Not very effective

PART IV: YOUR OPINIONS

41. What factors have facilitated the work of the School Council?

42. What factors have been barriers in the work of the School Council?

43. What is the most rewarding aspect of your participation on the School Council?

44. What further comments do you have?

45. If you would be willing to be interviewed on these or any other issues related to School Councils, please indicate such by filing out and mailing the enclosed postcard.

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO THE URBAN SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS

November 6, 1995

Dear Superintendent:

As you may know, I am the retired Deputy Superintendent of Schools (and former Acting Superintendent) in Springfield, Massachusetts.

I am currently engaged in a study of School Councils that were called into existence by the Massachusetts Education Reform Act. This research is part of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Massachusetts. I would like to survey the members of your School Council to develop a better understanding of the role played by the Council. Furthermore, I would like to personally interview some members of the Council.

I have attached a copy of the survey and the interview questions for your consideration. All respondents are to remain anonymous, and in the dissertation the data will be desegregated by district and Council member role. The completed study will be available to you and participants of the study.

In a few days, I will follow-up with a telephone call and hopefully arrange for the best possible way to conduct this survey with the least intrusion into your school's schedule.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this proposal.

Respectfully,

BRYANT ROBINSON, JR.
Retired Deputy Superintendent

APPENDIX C

LETTER TO THE URBAN SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

January, 1996

Dear Principal:

I am the retired Deputy Superintendent of Schools (and former Acting Superintendent) in Springfield, Massachusetts. I am hopeful that the information gathered from this study will be helpful to both you and me. This research is part of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Massachusetts. I have written to your Superintendent informing him of my research and requesting permission to distribute my survey to selected schools.

I am currently engaged in a study of School Councils that were called into existence by the Massachusetts Education Reform Act. I would like to survey the members of your School Councils to develop a better understanding of the role played by School Councils. Furthermore, I would like to personally interview some members of your School Councils.

Enclosed are copies of the questionnaire, the interview questions, and a postcard for those who would be willing to be interviewed. All respondents are to remain anonymous; and in the dissertation, the data will be desegregated by district and Council member role. Your school will not be identified. I will, of course, share the completed study with you and all School Council members.

I will call you in a day or two to see if you have received the packet and also if there are any other questions you might have.

Please return the postcard in the envelope with the questionnaires instead of mailing it separately as indicated on the bottom of the questionnaire.

Respectfully,

BRYANT ROBINSON, JR.
Retired Deputy Superintendent

APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIPT OF A PERSONAL INTERVIEW

INITIAL QUESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING
INTERVIEWS

- QUESTION 1: What factors, in your opinion, have facilitated the work of your School Council?
- QUESTION 2: What factors, in your opinion, may have been barriers or are barriers to the work of your School Council?
- QUESTION 3: One of the tasks mandated by the Massachusetts Education Reform Act for School Councils was to create a School Improvement Plan: (a) How did your School Council pursue in accomplishing that task?; and (b) What were the results?
- QUESTION 4: School Councils were given some control over budgets and charged to allocate funds for the implementation of School Improvement Plans: (a) How much control does your Council have over the school budget?; (b) How much budget is being allocated to implement a School Improvement Plan?; and (c) What specific items did your Council find for implementing a School Improvement Plan?
- QUESTION 5: School Councils were charged to increase parental involvement. Besides having parents serving on the School Councils, what other means have you used or plan to use to increase parental involvement in your school?
- QUESTION 6: School Councils were also asked to create a welcoming environment at their schools, in order to originate a positive climate characterized by tolerance and acceptance: (a) Have you investigated the climate at your school?; and (b) Have you made any changes or plans that would enhance the welcoming environment?
- QUESTION 7: What further comments or observations would you have to share regarding the School Councils based on your understanding of the goals of the Education Reform Act?

TRANSCRIPT #1

QUESTION: What factors have facilitated the work of your School Council?

ANSWER: Factors that contributed to the success of the school center decision-making team or council. There were really three issues. The first issue was a unity focus. People need to understand that there is no room for a vested interest, that we all have to agree that the mission of the psyche council is to basically provide the governance that will lead toward improvement for the total school. The second issue was the notion of mutual respect; meaning that there cannot be any differentiation between players. The parents, the community members, teachers, and principal need to have an equal voice and that voice needs to be heard. That required some work, by the way, because as you know it is the tendency of school-based people to try and dominate. One of the ways that I have worked around that is that we have a rotating chairpersonship. The third issue that is critically important is the one of communication. What that requires is an agreement that people are going to voice their concerns. That is tied very subtly to the issue of respect and agreement in terms of the equity in representation. But it also requires someone who can facilitate, in a sense, and provide a forum for open discussion. If that means questioning and helping people to understand and express and clarify, then that is again an important component in the success of the School Council.

INTERVIEWER: In that same context, are there issues that may evolve out of the common vocabulary in order to communicate accurately?

INTERVIEWEE: I think if I understand your question correctly, what you are asking is: How is it that we stay away from educational jargon, from the kind of language that teachers and professionals use, which is not necessarily the same as for parents and community members. Again, I think that there needs to be an understanding right up front that we are not going to talk in educational speak, we are going to talk as people would normally talk. But that also requires, if you will, a comfort level so that parents and community people can ask questions and say, "Wait a minute. You're not making any sense. What does this mean?" I am guilty of doing that sometimes too, and it requires a conscious effort on the part of every member to make sure that our language is a common one.

QUESTION: What factors have been barriers to the work of the School Council?

ANSWER: I guess I can respond to that from the perspective of someone who has been part of a School Council as a Principal for about eighteen months now. I served on a School Council as a community member for about two years prior to that, and I think that when you talk about barriers there are the issues of, again, control and comfort level. It is all tied together. The need for the Principal, in particular the Principal, cannot be overestimated. The reality is that my predecessor really dominated and controlled the site council here until I came, and so there was really a period of about six months where we needed to create a new way of doing business. That required, again, lots of effort on my part as Principal but, more importantly, the need to nurture the participation of teachers as well as parents and community here. Very honestly, I replaced a very competent administrator, but the issue of

control is one that I had to overcome. I believe that government councils need to be democratic because if not, if people don't know and believe that they are going to have a voice in the decision-making process, they are not going to participate; and I don't believe that the issue of true governance is really given fair play under those conditions.

QUESTION: One of the tasks mandated by the Massachusetts Education Reform Act for School Councils was to create a School Improvement Plan: (a) How did your School Council pursue in accomplishing that task?; and (b) What were the results?

ANSWER: Again I had eluded, I think, prior to our going on tape about the School Improvement Plan and the process that I had witnessed prior to my coming on board and, more importantly, the process that we have used since then. My sense is that the development of the School Improvement Plan prior to my being here was something that was done kind of as a community effort where everybody sat down with a pencil and paper and they tried to agree on what it was that the document was going to look like and then how it would be written. I chose a different tactic, and that was to sit down with members of the site council and say, "What do we want the School to look like next year and in three years and five years and ten years?" We began the process through a dialogue. We argued about some of the issues in terms of what the needs of the school were, in terms of our mission, our vision and our goals--always trying to keep the students first. The one thing I can say about the development of the School Improvement Plan here is that we took the needs of the children first and then we decided to look at what it was that the adults would have to do and

how they would need to behave in order to support the achievement of the goals set for the children. That required, if you will, some work in terms of what we, as adults, would need to do as to how we would behave with children, how it would be that we would promote issues of self-esteem, identity, promote the diversity that exists here, professional development. So those issues all needed to be tied to that fundamental goal which is the kids. Then the other area, frankly, that I felt was necessary in order to have a School Improvement Plan (and I had no trouble convincing the School Council that we needed to do this) was to have clear goals set for parents so that parents understood that they were full partners in the process. It seems to have worked really well. The School Improvement Plan here is very ambitious and what was interesting was the process that was used in the site council which I described in terms of starting with a dialogue and then really building a plan around the needs of the kids in school and then present it to the staff. Their initial reaction was they choked on it because they thought that it was (1) overly ambitious, and (2) it was holding them to a standard that they were not entirely comfortable with until they had a chance to really reflect on it. So we went through a period of reflection over what all of this meant for us as faculty, as staff, and as parents, and what the impact would be on the students. We were always coming back to the kids because, as I said to the site council, as I said to the faculty, if this isn't going to help kids, then we don't need to include it in our plan. This is not an exercise in developing, if you will, a blueprint for a school if it's not going to have immediate benefits for the kids.

INTERVIEWER: What was the reaction of parents? Do you have a parent PTO-type organization? You said that the teachers, when they received it, sort of struggled. What did the parents get a chance to say?

INTERVIEWEE: What was interesting was I presented it both almost concurrently to or simultaneously to the staff, to the faculty, and to the parents. Although it met with resistance from the faculty, what I found was that the parents were in full support in what it was that we were attempting to do. It created a wonderful, wonderful dialogue between parents and faculty over the education of their children. If it did nothing else, what it did was it opened the communication that, frankly, had not existed, to my satisfaction, between parents as to what they wanted to see for their children and for the school and what the faculty saw as a need for the school. To the extent that we sat together and parents said, "What do you mean, you don't think you can do this for our children?"

INTERVIEWER: So they posed those kinds of questions?

INTERVIEWEE: They posed those kinds of questions to the faculty and really, I think, moved the faculty. So that to me was one of the most encouraging aspects of the process, and I had to look at it in terms of the process not necessarily the tension that resulted from it. It was really exciting, to be honest with you.

INTERVIEWER: Results ongoing?

INTERVIEWEE: Let me just start by saying that one of the things that we did this year was the periodical. The faculty, the site-based team, and the parents would sit

back, take the plan, look at it, and say: "Are we on target? Are we still on course?" Or, "Where is it that we have gone adrift?" It was also a very healthy process because what it did was it served to encourage teachers to really acknowledge the work that they are doing because they realize that we are doing an awful lot. In terms of the impact on parents, parents are very pleased. They feel that the school is moving forward. I would say that the level of confidence on the part of the parents right now is greater than it has ever been. I look at that in two years. I look at that because I believe that parents understand what it is that the school is attempting to do. They agree with what it is that we are attempting to do, and they also recognize that we are willing to be accountable for what we say we're doing. The second piece of that is that we look at the progress that we're making toward the implementation of our objectives and our goals. We're looking at issues of safety and student achievement and professional development and all of the areas with the understanding that we knew that this was not a one-year plan but that this was a plan that would require a number of years to fully realize. I think that was one of the things that had frightened, if you will, the staff in the beginning. They really thought that this was more than they could handle. Once they realized that they didn't have to do everything immediately, then I think they felt much more comfortable and now appreciate the fact that we have a direction that everybody is heading in.

INTERVIEWER: Because it is a journey, would there be any tentative kind of check-off that says: "Are we on target? Does the initial goal need to be modified?"

INTERVIEWEE: The answer is "Yes"; and again, as I said, we periodically did that. What we have done is, the way our plan is structured, we have time lines. We have persons responsible, and we specify how it is that we are going to measure whether or not we are on target. So for each of the areas we have met this objective, we are meeting this objective or no this is something that we haven't reached yet. Now that is something that was a process that we engaged in over the course of the year. We are now synthesizing all of that into the development of, if you will, a year two plan which is really an amendment of the existing plan. Now interesting enough was willingness on the part of parents and faculty, because they felt being important. For example, there you have added a community service learning component to the objectives. They have added an early intervention component to the plan. They have added more to the parent training and participation component because historically what we were finding at the school was that parents were often very active here in terms of volunteering, in terms of raising funds for the school. And let me tell you, it is wonderful to see what the parents have done. But we were not doing a whole lot for them. We certainly were not in any way reciprocating for the work that they were doing by involving them in the decision-making process. But I think that it has changed and, as a result, parents really feel empowered and not just the parents that were traditionally involved in the PTO but it is a very diverse group of parents who feel comfortable now questioning and coming forward to offer both suggestions and support. With regard to our attempts, continuous involvement of the school principal, teachers, parents, and community leaders helped the School Council to design a profound and comprehensive School Improvement Plan which was later approved by the school departments and

was also reviewed and approved by the appropriate school committees.

INTERVIEWER: Good. I am going to come back to that at some point before we complete our time together. But let me just slide to this third question.

QUESTION: School Councils were given some control over budgets and charged to allocate funds for the implementation of School Improvement Plans: (a) How much control does your Council have over the school budget?; (b) How much budget is being allocated to implement a School Improvement Plan?; and (c) What specific items did your Council fund for implementing a School Improvement Plan?

ANSWER: You know that this is an evolutionary process. We are not anywhere near approaching the realization of total control for the school. A lot of it still unfortunately comes from, it is handed down from, the Central Office in terms of the allocation of resources, both personnel and budget. What we did last year and what we will do this year is based on the amount of money available to us. We allocated the money in the following manner and then we sat down again, looked at our School Improvement Plan, looked at the needs of the school and the needs of the children, and began to allocate the resources. What we are going to do this year is to look at our School Improvement Plan and look at the needs of the school and the needs of the kids, and begin to allocate the resources. There is one area that we are weak in. It is in the area of allowing the turning over of the decision making for the allocation of resources to the Council because we don't have enough experience at it yet and we still need kind of leadership from the Principal because the Principal has the

big picture. What this requires is a process of education for the site-based team in terms of everything that goes into running a school--everything from buying sponges and toilet paper and tampons to textbooks and software and hardware. So that what we did was we said if we have one hundred dollars for people, we will set aside sixty dollars for educational supplies and materials, recognizing that forty dollars goes to those other issues about maintaining the physical plant and some of the supplies that are needed. Then they made the decision in terms of how the sixty dollars for people would be expended. Again, they came to realize after going through the process that it wasn't just a question of saying, "Okay, every child is going to get sixty dollars." Because life isn't fair. The bilingual program children, for example, did not have access to the same kinds of things that the English-speaking children had. The site-based Council recognized that and agreed to spend a disproportionate amount of money. We would very much like to see us move towards school-based budgeting; but until we have full control over the budget for the school, and that means personnel and the other issues, we are limited in terms of the decision making that it made around issues of funding.

INTERVIEWER: But I think I understood you to say, however, that even in that process parents begin to recognize, to use your language, that life is not fair and that there were those who need to spend disproportionately in some areas and that they have an appreciation for those kinds of things, or are beginning to.

INTERVIEWEE: The answer is "Yes" and, interestingly enough, the decisions of the School Council, in terms of the allocation of resources, have been reflected in the

allocations made by the PTO. Last year, the PTO here raised eighteen thousand dollars and they gave thirty-five hundred dollars to the Principal for a computer for his office and for a fax and those kinds of things. They also gave thirty-five hundred dollars for library books. Two thousand of those thirty-five hundred dollars were for bilingual materials. They recognize a need to move toward our principal of equity.

INTERVIEWER: Let me just go back. How much was implemented towards the School Improvement Plan and what specifically did it purchase?

INTERVIEWEE: In terms of what specifically it purchased, basically what we have done is we have invested heavily in technology. We have doubled our computer capability here at our school. We have invested heavily in textbooks and upgrading instructional materials. This year, the decision was made to invest in the Early Intervention and the Accelerated Program. There are clearly set priorities that revolved around the School Improvement Plan.

INTERVIEWER: The next two questions I think are, again, two sides of the coin possibly and you have touched on some of these issues already.

QUESTION: School Councils were charged to increase parental involvement. Besides having parents serving on the School Council, what other means have you used or plan to use to increase parental involvement in your school?

ANSWER: Obviously, this again stems from my personal interest in making the school reflective as the needs of kids and parents. Our commitment to the Education Reform

Act is to concentrate on many factors; one of them being the need for parent involvement. While we occasionally involve parents in our fund-raising activities, we also want them to share in the governance of the school. And in order to do that, parents have to feel that they are a part of the school and that requires a tremendous degree of involvement. As a resolution for pursuing such a goal, last year, we arranged a number of different training sessions for parents.

INTERVIEWER: An example?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, we had a program called "Kids in the Kitchen" and what this was was a nutrition program with parents and kids coming together to school in the evening and we talked about nutrition and made nutritious snacks. We did all of those kinds of things. My interest again is to bring kids and families together and bring them into the school so that they see that this is a place where parents belong. We had, I think, two hundred and twenty parents that night. So two hundred and twenty people. A dance here, a family dance, we had three hundred fifty parents, where I think in total we had three hundred eighty people come through the door. At Open House, we had parents come from the North End. One of the ways that we did that is I have set an expectation to parents and I have said, "Do you have a responsibility activity during the course of the year? I mean, I cannot ask you to come to everything, but I think you should have the responsibility to come to at least one." The PTO agreed, for example, to fund a bus that went from the North End. The one from the North End had to make two trips and both of them were standing room only. This place was hopping. What I also did was we asked parents to sign in. I sent a letter to every parent

who wasn't able to come and I said, "Gee, I was so sorry that you weren't able to make it. I do hope that you will be able to make the next event." Let me tell you. The response from that overwhelmed me. I got parents who called me and said, "It is so nice to get a note from you saying that you noticed that I wasn't there and that you really wanted me to come." Then they felt that we were serious about it. Again, that requires a lot of time and a lot of work. But I think that it is important. I really do. We cannot run schools without parents.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned earlier that this is one of the themes in your School Improvement Plan which is to say that it has the support of the Council. So the Council is out there with you?

INTERVIEWEE: Absolutely. As a result, teachers now feel that they too share in the responsibility for getting parents to participate. When there is an event, teachers feel that they have a responsibility to say to their kids before they go home, "Look, make sure you tell your Mom that I want them to come." And you know kids. It is very simple. The next day you say, "How many of you can't come?" Somewhere, however, there is an acknowledgment that you notice what is communicated to the home--that we value the participation of parents.

QUESTION: School Councils were also asked to create a welcoming environment at their schools, in order to originate a positive climate characterized by tolerance and acceptance: (a) Have you investigated the climate at your school?; and (b) Have you made any changes or plans that would enhance the welcoming environment?

ANSWER: The answer is "Yes". What I did was last year obviously any time you walked into a building you knew what the climate was. This was a very closed school. There were a few select people who had access to the Principal in the school. In essence, what I needed to do was I needed to open that process up. To do that is pressing the flesh, getting out to the community to baseball games and doing all of those things and saying, "Gee, it is nice to see you here."

QUESTION: What further comments or observations would you have to share regarding the School Councils based on your understanding of the goals of the Education Reform Act?

ANSWER: School Councils' work is often frustrated by the lack of sufficient funds and support personnel for implementation of programs proposed by the Council members.

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